

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30, 2014

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met at 9:38 a.m., in room SD-124, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed (chairman) presiding.

Present: Senators Reed, Tester, Merkley, Begich, Murkowski, and Blunt.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE

STATEMENT OF TOM TIDWELL, CHIEF

ACCOMPANIED BY TONY DIXON, DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC PLANNING, BUDGET, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Let me call the hearing to order.

Good morning. This is the third hearing of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee on the President's fiscal year 2015 budget request, and today, we will discuss the budget for the United States Forest Service.

I am very pleased to welcome Forest Service Chief, Tom Tidwell. Chief, thank you for your service, and for your support to the important programs of the Forest Service. Thank you very much.

And I also recognize the agency's Budget Director, Tony Dixon, who is testifying before the subcommittee for the first time. So welcome, Tony. Good to have you here.

Turning to the budget request for the Forest Service, the fiscal year 2015 request is a total of \$5.7 billion, including \$4.77 billion in discretionary spending. In addition, the President has proposed a significant budgetary shift to provide \$954 million in fire suppression funding within the disaster cap.

Since I assumed the chairmanship of this subcommittee, we have been forced to make unfortunate tradeoffs to provide the appropriate resources for fire suppression, both on the frontend—through increases in the 10-year average—and on the backend—through repayment of borrowing—because the 10-year average proved insufficient.

In the last 2 years alone, we have been forced to carve out more than \$1 billion from other accounts in order to pay for unanticipated emergency firefighting costs. This has been a change from traditional practice under which extraordinary firefighting costs were treated as emergencies, just like other disasters.

These additional obligations have come at a cost in the investments we can make in public land maintenance and construction, water and sewer grants, land acquisition, and every other account funded in this bill. And I know you, Chief, are as worried as we are about the Forest Service just becoming "the fire service." That cannot happen.

This is just as troubling to me as it is to my western colleagues. Indeed, I would note that my colleagues, Senators Wyden and Crapo, have introduced bipartisan legislation in the senate to deal with this problem. An identical bill has been introduced in the House by Congressman Mike Simpson, former chairman of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, and it has been co-sponsored by Representative Ken Calvert, the current chairman of the subcommittee.

While Rhode Island does not have any national forest lands, we do rely on the Forest Service's expertise and grant programs for our State and private forested lands. We all agree that it is a Federal responsibility to fight fires on Federal lands to protect the life and property of Americans. But if we continue down the path that we have been forced under the current budget caps, we put in jeopardy the rest of the Forest Service's mission.

For Rhode Island, that would mean losing the Forest Service's expertise in research and science that has led to breakthroughs to defend against the invasive species and disease that attack our trees in the country and in the city, Forest Legacy funds to protect threatened areas, and urban and community forest funds to get people outdoors.

That is why I think what you have done, Chief, to work on the budget proposal to move a portion of the spending into the disaster cap is such a great step forward. It takes care of three problems that we have been struggling with.

First, it removes the agency's need to borrow from non-fire accounts and provides a steady stream of funding throughout the fire season, so that you can do both your firefighting and your other work without setting aside funds within construction, land acquisition, and your mandatory programs in case there is a need for it.

Second, it allows us to put emphasis on the programs that will help you prevent catastrophic fire in the future, such as hazardous fuels reduction, watershed and vegetation management, and inholdings acquisitions.

Third, it protects the programs that would otherwise get cut within future budget proposals to pay for fire needs like research and State grant programs.

So with this budget proposal and your recent acquisition of air tankers from the Coast Guard and next generation air tanker contractors, it is quite possible that fiscal year 2015 could be the turning point in adopting a more rational approach to fire management. And you deserve much credit for this progress, Chief. Thank you very much.

While I am pleased that we are able to move the administration to address the fire problem, I am disappointed to see the cuts to other programs like research, State and private forestry, and international forestry, even with the shift to firefighting resources, that are being proposed.

I am looking forward to discussing with you how we can work together to restore and strengthen these programs as well.

Now, before turning to Senator Murkowski, the bottom line here is, and I do not mean to sound too cute, but these firefighting funds are just burning up your entire budget. Our budget too, because what we have to provide for firefighting, we cannot provide for State water funds, infrastructure, national parks, a host of programs. So we have to get this right.

With that, Senator Murkowski, please.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome Chief.

It is good to be examining the budget request for the Forest Service for fiscal year 2015. Mr. Chairman, I do not think we are going to need any assistance with firefighting here in Washington, DC this morning. It is a mess out there, it is so wet.

Chief, I think I mentioned at the hearing last year, when we had the 2014 budget in front of us that, I said that it felt a little bit like Groundhog's Day. Well, I am back at Groundhog Day all over again. Every year, you and I have this conversation. You commit to working with me to improve the timber sale program and permitting for other multiple use activities on the Tongass, and then we move to the next year and, we are having the same conversation about really why things have not improved. And again, we are just facing the same thing today.

Despite repeated pledges from the Forest Service to increase timber harvest levels, we continue to steadily march towards losing what remains of that timber industry in southeast Alaska.

Our 2013 timber harvest numbers did improve a little bit to 36 million board feet compared to 21 the year before, but you and I both know, Chief, that that is well, well below the allowable sales quantity of 267 million board feet. It is far short of what your own economists say that the market demand is in southeast, or what it takes to sustain any kind of a viable forest products industry within the region.

I am trying to look on the positive side. I am trying to find some hopeful signs here that we might be turning the corner, but it seems like every time there is something out there, we run up against a roadblock. A great example, of course, is the Big Thorne sale. We have been talking about the Big Thorne sale. It was supposed to be bringing in 150 million board feet. This was the sale that everybody was counting on, the sale that your agency said was going to be absolutely necessary. It was going to be critical to making the transition to second growth that you keep talking about in the Tongass. Everybody knew that the Big Thorne was what was going to be able to help us piece it together.

But what has happened to it? It has been on hold since September of last year. I hope you will have a little bit of an update

for me this morning on when we might see this critical sale offered. Every year, I bring up the situation with the roadless rule exemption. On the 26th of March, the Ninth Circuit upheld the roadless rule exemption for the Tongass.

I know that this administration did not defend the exemption. Alaska, my State, had to take it on itself. I am glad we did. I also know that this is not the end in the courts.

So again, I think you are going to hear in my questions this morning a great of concern about what is going on within the Tongass, the impact of the roadless rule, how the ruling will affect management actions. In my view, I hope we are going to see balance restored with respect to the conservation and economic development there.

Now, with regards to the budget and the chairman's comments here this morning, once again, you are proposing to consolidate several line items into one big pot called "Integrated Resource Restoration." We talk about this, again, also every year. And I am sympathetic to the Forest Service's desire to improve efficiencies, but until we can really see some concrete results from these three pilot programs, I just cannot support making this program permanent across the agencies.

You have a multiple use mandate there at the Forest Service, and one of the most important ways that we have here in Congress to ensure that you are following this mandate is having a budget that shows where and how much the agency is spending on activities that we, here in Congress, believe are important.

So whether it is for timber, whether it is for recreation, habitat improvement, whatever it is, we cannot sacrifice our oversight role solely for the sake of efficiency. And again, I say this every year.

The chairman speaks to the issue of fire borrowing. When we look to ways that we can improve financial management at the Forest Service, really, one of those ways is how we deal with the fire borrowing situation, which disrupts important programs by effectively robbing Peter to pay Paul until an undetermined date in the future. I think it is a bad way to budget, a bad way to manage important programs.

I do share the goal of the propose fire cap adjustment, but I am concerned whether in its current form, it is the most fiscally responsible way to proceed.

I do think that the administration's proposal is a good starting point for discussing how we deal with fire borrowing, but I think the committee, OMB, and the firefighting agencies need to work together to reach a resolution that not only fixes the problem, but is also politically tenable in the current fiscally constrained environment. So we need to be working together on this to find a workable solution.

There are many other important issues we need to work on like how to effectively modernize our air tanker fleet, promote fire-adapted communities, and meet our obligations to communities that are dependent upon our national forests for economic survival.

So I look forward to hearing your comments this morning, some updates, and then the questions and answers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. Thank you. Do any of my colleagues want to make a brief opening statement?

Senator TESTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Murkowski. And I will be very brief.

I want to thank you both, Mr. Dixon and Chief Tidwell for being here. I want to thank you for your work. Your agency, you know the area intimately, has a profound impact on Montana, whether it is from recreation, wildfires, sawmills, whatever it may be.

My focus and my questions are going to be around the fire-fighting ability that you are going to have for aircraft, and it is going to be around some of the same things Senator Murkowski talked about, and that is timber cut.

I can tell you, and you correct me if I am wrong, but I believe every timber sale in Montana was blocked. I will be the first one to fight not having public input on timber sales, because I think it is critically important. By the same token, I am really getting sick of the obstructionists, and I look forward to any ideas you might have to help streamline that process.

With that, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to working with both these gentlemen and the Forest Service to make things better in our public lands.

Senator REED. Thank you very much.

Chief Tidwell, please.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF TOM TIDWELL

KEY AUTHORITIES

Mr. TIDWELL. Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, once again, it is a privilege to be here. Mr. Chairman, thank you for your opening remarks, Senator Murkowski for yours. You did an excellent job to make all the key points that I had planned to make in my opening remarks.

I did want to reflect on last year when I was up here to testify. I was asking for your support for several key authorities that were about to expire: stewardship contracting, the Good Neighbor Authority. So I want to thank you for your good work to provide these key authorities through the 2014 Appropriations bill, and also for your support for the Forestry Title in the Farm bill.

FIRE SUPPRESSION CAP ADJUSTMENT

Those authorities, plus this budget request, really reflect the opportunity, the responsibility we have to restore and maintain our national forest and grasslands. Through this proposed budget fire suppression cap adjustment, we will finally be able to stop the disruptive practice of having to shutdown our projects every August and September, to stop the work that reduces the effects of fire, to stop the work that produces jobs just to be able to shift money to pay for fire suppression. I want to thank you, for the job you have done to repay those funds every 3 to 6 months later.

WILDFIRE DISASTER FUNDING ACT

I, too, need to recognize the work from Senators Wyden and Crapo for introducing the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act and the members of the subcommittee that are cosponsors of this bill.

Senator Murkowski, we do want to work with the committee on finding a solution for this. The legislation that is here in the Senate and the House, plus the work that we have been doing in the administration, I think is a very good starting place, and we do want to work with the subcommittee to be able to find a resolution to this issue once and for all.

Over the last 10 years, fire funding has gone from 13 percent of our budget to over 40 percent. The 10-year average has increased by \$500 million, and just since 2012, the 10-year average has gone up \$156 million. Now, under a constrained budget, these increases, they have to come from all the other programs. The other programs that are essential to provide all the benefits that people want, the public demands from their national forests.

It also has had a critical impact to our staffing. Over this period of time, our staffing in our national forest system, the folks that manage the national forests, has gone down 35 percent; staffing and forest management, down 49 percent. Now, at the same time, we are actually putting out about the same level of outputs that we worked 12 years ago with a much reduced staff, and I give a lot of credit to our work, our employees. They are doing an outstanding job to work with the communities and partners to be able to do as much work as they possibly can. But it is time to recognize that something needs to change here.

Now, I cannot change that the fire seasons are now 70 to 80 days longer. The fires are burning hotter. We are dealing with these extensive droughts that we will, no doubt, talk about today, and more and more homes are in the Wildland Urban Interface. But what we can do, by increasing the pace and scale of restoration, we can reduce the effects of wildfires to our community, making it easier for us to suppress these fires. And we can do that by what this budget is proposing with the increased funding that we are asking for in some very key programs.

FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET

This request is \$125 million less than in 2014 enacted, which reflects the difficult choices that we have had to make to address the deficit reduction. But it does provide for some key increases in programs that will help us to restore our national forests, reduce the threat of wildfire, reduce the threat to wildlife, to threatened and endangered species, and also reduce the impact to recreational settings that are the reason 170 million people visit the national forest and grasslands every year.

FIRE SUPPRESSION CAP ADJUSTMENT

Now, this level of preparedness, it will still provide for a level of funding that will suppress 98 percent of all the fires that we take initial attack on. It also requests a funding level to cover the costs for 99 percent of our wildfires. Then it requests a fire suppression cap adjustment that basically will cover about 1 percent of our fires, which equals about 30 percent of the cost. It is these fires that, we feel, should be considered a natural disaster, and that is the purpose of the budget fire suppression cap adjustment.

Now is the time, for us to make the shift. Chairman as you mentioned, in 2015, it could be the time when we recognize that we

have actually made a change to address the fire suppression issue, and at the same time to be able to increase our investment in the national forests and grasslands.

PREPARED STATEMENT

The science is clear. It is supported by the results on the ground. We can reduce the effects. We can reduce the effects of the severity of insect and disease outbreaks. We can reduce the impacts to water quality, but we must increase the pace and scale of our restoration.

So again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here to address the committee, and I look forward to your questions.

[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TOM TIDWELL

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's budget request for the Forest Service for fiscal year 2015. I appreciate the support this subcommittee has shown for the Forest Service in the past, and in particular, thank you for your hard work on the fiscal year 2014 appropriations act. When I testified before you last year, there were a number of important authorities, like stewardship contracting and good neighbor authority, which were set to soon expire. Thanks to the hard work of Congress on the 2014 appropriations act and the 2014 farm bill, we are in a much better position this year. I look forward to continuing to work together with members of the subcommittee to ensure that stewardship of our Nation's forests and grasslands continues to meet the desires and expectations of the American people. I am confident that this budget will allow the Forest Service to meet this goal while demonstrating fiscal restraint, efficiency, and cost-effective spending.

The fiscal year 2015 President's budget for the Forest Service focuses on three key areas: restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and managing wildland fires. It calls for a fundamental change in how wildfire suppression is funded. It proposes a new and fiscally responsible funding strategy for wildland fire, contributes to long-term economic growth, and continues our efforts to achieve the greatest benefits for the taxpayer at the least cost. This budget will enable us to more effectively reduce fire risk, manage landscapes more holistically, and increase resiliency of the Nation's forests and rangelands as well as the communities that border them.

The President's 2015 budget also includes a separate, fully paid for \$56 billion Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative (OGS Initiative). The Initiative identifies additional discretionary investments that can spur economic progress, promote opportunity, and strengthen national security. The OGS Initiative includes funding for Forest Service programs. The OGS Initiative includes \$18 million for Research and Development and would focus on energy security and national economic stability while simultaneously addressing our conservation and restoration goals. In addition, the OGS Initiative includes \$61 million for Facilities and Trails to provide essential infrastructure maintenance and repair to sustain the benefits of existing infrastructure as domestic investments to grow our economy.

As part of the President's Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative and a permanent legislative proposal, the Forest Service would also have the opportunity to compete for conservation and infrastructure project funding included within the Centennial initiative. The Centennial initiative supporting the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service features a competitive opportunity for the public land management bureaus within the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service to address conservation and infrastructure project needs. The program would be managed within Interior's Office of the Secretary in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture with clearly defined project criteria. The administration proposes \$100 million for the National Park Service anniversary's Centennial Land Management Investment Fund, as part of the Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative and \$100 million for conservation and infrastructure projects annually for 3 years as part of a separate legislative proposal.

The Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative also includes a \$1 billion Climate Resilience Fund. A portion of this funding source allows us to continue to invest in research to better understand the projected impacts of climate change and how we can better prepare our communities and infrastructure. The Fund would

also serve to fund breakthroughs in technologies and resilient infrastructure development that will make us more resilient in the face of changing climate. The Fund proposal includes three Forest Service programs: an increase of \$50 million for State Fire Assistance Grants to increase the number of communities that are “Firewise” and the number of communities implementing building codes and building protection requirements, resulting in increased protection of communities, their residents and private property; an increase of \$50 million for Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) and Hazardous Fuels to enhance support for public lands managers to manage landscape and watershed planning for increased resilience and risk reduction; and an increased \$25 million for Urban and Community Forestry to maintain, restore and improve urban forests mitigating heat islands and other climate change impact.

VALUE OF THE FOREST SERVICE

Our mission at the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The Forest Service manages a system of national forests and grasslands totaling 193 million acres in 44 States and Puerto Rico, an area almost twice the size of California. These lands entrusted to our care provide some of the richest resources and most breathtaking scenery in the Nation, are the source of drinking water for millions of Americans, and support hundreds of thousands of jobs. Thousands of communities across the Nation depend on the national forests for their social well-being and economic prosperity.

Since our founding in 1905, as the Nation’s leading forestry organization, we continue to serve Americans by supporting the sustainable stewardship of more than 600 million acres of non-Federal forest land across the Nation, including 423 million acres of private forest land, 69 million acres of State forest land, 18 million acres of Tribal forests, and over 100 million acres of urban and community forests. This commitment to sustainable forest management helps Americans use their lands while caring for them in ways that benefit them, their families, their communities, and the entire Nation.

We also maintain the largest forestry research organization in the world, with more than a century of discoveries in wood and forest products, fire behavior and management, and sustainable forest management. We are pursuing cutting-edge research in nanotechnology and green building materials, expanding markets for woody biomass. Land managers across the Nation use the results of our research to conserve forests, ensuring continuation of a full range of benefits for future generations.

America’s forests, grasslands, and other open spaces are integral to the social, ecological, and economic well-being of the Nation. They play a vital role in providing public benefits such as clean air, clean water, mineral and energy production, and fertile soils for supporting timber, forage, carbon storage, food and fiber, fish and wildlife habitat, along with myriad opportunities for outdoor recreation. The Forest Service provides a valuable service to the public by restoring and improving forest, grassland, and watershed health; by producing new knowledge through our research; and by providing financial and technical assistance to partners, including private forest landowners.

The benefits from Forest Service programs and activities include jobs and economic activity. Jobs and economic benefits stem not only from public use of the national forests and grasslands, but also from Forest Service management activities and infrastructure investments. We completed an economic analysis that calculated activities on the National Forest System contributed over \$36 billion to America’s gross domestic product, and supported nearly 450,000 jobs during fiscal year 2011.

Through our Job Corps and other programs including the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, we provide training and employment for America’s youth, and we help veterans transition to civilian life. Our Urban and Community Forestry Program has provided jobs and career-training opportunities for underemployed adults and at-risk youth.

The Forest Service routinely leverages taxpayer funds by engaging partners who contribute to investments in land management projects and activities. In fiscal year 2013, for example, we entered into more than 8,200 grants and agreements with partners who made a total of about \$540 million in cash and noncash contributions. Combined with our own contribution of nearly \$730 million, the total value of these partnerships was over \$1.27 billion.

Other noncommercial uses provide crucial benefits and services to the American people. Many Tribal members use the national forests and grasslands for hunting, fishing, and gathering wild foods and other materials for personal use. They also

use sacred sites on National Forest Service (NFS) lands for ritual and spiritual purposes.

National forests and grasslands attract about 160 million visits annually, and 55 percent of those visitors engage in strenuous physical activities. Based on studies showing that outdoor activities contribute to improved health and increased fitness, the availability of the Nation's forests and grasslands to all Americans provides other tangible benefits. In addition, since more than 83 percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas where opportunities to experience nature are often reduced, the Forest Service has developed an array of programs designed to get people into the woods, especially children. Each year, we reach an average of more than 5 million people with conservation education programs.

CHALLENGES TO CONSERVATION

Our Nation's forest and grassland resources continue to be at risk due to drought, uncharacteristically severe wildfire behavior, invasive species, and outbreaks of insects and disease. Although biodiversity remains high on national forests and grasslands, habitat degradation and invasive species pose serious threats to 27 percent of all forest-associated plants and animals, a total of 4,005 species.

The spread of homes and communities into wildfire-prone areas is an increasing management challenge. From 2000 to 2030, the United States could see substantial increases in housing density on 44 million acres of private forest lands nationwide, an area larger than North and South Carolina combined. More than 70,000 communities are now at risk from wildfire, and less than 15,000 have community wildfire protection plans.

This same growth and development are also reducing America's forest habitat and fragmenting what remains. From 2010 to 2060, the United States is predicted to lose up to 31 million acres of forested lands, an area larger than Pennsylvania.

Forest Service scientists predict that fire seasons could return to levels not seen since the 1940s, exceeding 12 million to 15 million acres annually. Highlighting these concerns, for the first time since the 1950s, more than 7 million acres burned nationwide in 2000 and more than 9 million acres burned in 2012. In 2013, the largest fire ever recorded in the Sierra Nevada occurred, and a devastating blaze in Arizona killed 19 highly experienced firefighters.

BUDGET REQUEST AND FOCUS AREAS

To meet the challenges ahead, the Forest Service is focusing in three key areas: restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and managing wildland fires. We continue to implement cultural initiatives and cost savings measures focused on achieving a safer, more inclusive, and more efficient organization. To help us achieve these goals, the President's proposed overall budget for discretionary funding for the Forest Service in fiscal year 2015 is \$4.77 billion. The budget also proposes a new and fiscally responsible funding strategy for wildland fire that recognizes that catastrophic wildland fires should be considered disasters, funded in part by additional budget authority provided through a budget cap adjustment for wildland fire suppression. Combined with the funding for fire suppression in the discretionary request, this strategy will fully fund estimated wildfire suppression funding needs.

Restoring Resilient Landscapes

Our approach to addressing ecological degradation is to embark on efforts that support ecological restoration allowing for healthier more resilient ecosystems. In cooperation with our partners across shared landscapes, we continue to ensure that the Nation's forests and grasslands retain their ability to deliver the social, economic, and ecological values and benefits that Americans want and need now and for generations to come.

In February 2011, President Obama launched the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, setting forth a comprehensive agenda for conservation and outdoor recreation in the 21st century. In tandem with the President's initiative, Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack outlined an All Lands vision for conservation calling for partnerships and collaboration to reach shared goals for restoring healthy, resilient forested landscapes across all landownerships nationwide.

In response, the Forest Service has launched an initiative to accelerate restoration across shared landscapes. The Accelerated Restoration Initiative builds on Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR), the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), the 2012 planning rule, and other restoration-related programs and initiatives to pick up the pace of ecological restoration while creating more jobs in rural communities. Our collaborative, holistic approach to restoring forest and

grassland health relies on the State Forest Action Plans and the Forest Service's own Watershed Condition Framework to identify high-priority areas for restoration treatments.

In fiscal year 2012, Congress authorized the Forest Service to pilot test the combination of multiple budget line items into a single line item for IRR. By combining funds from five budget line items we can better integrate and align watershed protection and restoration into all aspects of our management. In fiscal year 2013, our integrated approach restored almost over 2,533,000 acres of forest and grassland, decommissioned 1,490 miles of roads, and restored 4,168 miles of stream habitat substantially improving conditions across 12 entire watersheds across the NFS. Given the success demonstrated in the three pilot regions, we propose fully implementing IRR across the entire Forest Service in fiscal year 2015. We propose a national IRR budget of \$820 million. Investing in IRR in fiscal year 2015 is expected to result in 2,700,000 watershed acres treated, 3.1 billion board feet of timber volume sold, approximately 2,000 miles of road decommissioned, and 3,262 miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced. An estimated 26 watersheds will be restored to a higher condition class in fiscal year 2015.

CFLRP was created in 2009 to help restore high-priority forested landscapes, improve forest health, promote job stability, create a reliable wood supply, and to reduce firefighting risks across the United States. The Secretary of Agriculture selected 23 large-scale projects for 10-year funding. Although the projects are mostly on NFS land, the collaborative nature of the program ties communities to local forest landscapes, engaging them in the work needed to restore the surrounding landscapes and watersheds. We propose to increase authorization for this successful collaborative program in the fiscal year 2015 President's budget. We propose to increase the program authorization to \$80 million and are requesting \$60 million in fiscal year 2015 to continue implementation of the current 23 projects and for inclusion of additional projects. All of the existing projects are on track to meet their 10-year goals, and to date, more than 588,461 acres of wildlife habitat have been improved, while generating 814 million board feet of timber and 1.9 million green tons of biomass for energy production and other uses.

To gain efficiencies in our planning efforts, the Forest Service is moving forward with implementing a new land management planning rule. The new rule requires an integrated approach to forest plan preparation and multilevel monitoring of outcomes that allows for adaptive management, improved project implementation, and facilitated landscape scale restoration. We are also working to be more efficient in our environmental analyses under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through development of three restoration-related categorical exclusions promoting hydrologic, aquatic, and landscape restoration approved in 2013. Other investments in "Electronic Management of NEPA" (eMNEPA) have significantly reduced administrative costs; we estimate that we save approximately \$17 million each year because of these investments. Collectively, these efforts will help land managers to focus on collaborative watershed restoration efforts that also promote jobs and economic opportunities in rural communities.

Building Thriving Communities

The Forest Service works to build thriving communities across the Nation by helping urban communities reconnect with the outdoors, by expanding the benefits that both rural and urban residents get from outdoor recreation, and by providing communities with the many economic benefits that result from sustainable multiple-use management of the national forests and grasslands.

Through our Recreation, Wilderness and Heritage program, we are dedicated to serving tens of millions of recreation visitors each year. Rural communities rely on the landscapes around them for hunting, fishing, and various amenities; the places they live are vital to their identity and social well-being. We maintain these landscapes for the character, settings, and sense of place that people have come to expect, such as popular trail corridors and viewsheds.

In support of the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative and the First Lady's "Let's Move" initiative, we are implementing a Framework for Sustainable Recreation. The framework is designed to ensure that people of all ages and from every socioeconomic background have opportunities to visit their national forests and grasslands—and, if they wish, to contribute through volunteer service. We focus on sustaining recreational and heritage-related activities on the National Forest System for generations to come. That includes maintaining and rehabilitating historic buildings and other heritage assets for public use, such as campgrounds and other historic facilities built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

A significant portion of our budget to sustain operations for outdoor recreation—roughly 20 percent—comes from fees collected under the Federal Lands Recreation

Enhancement Act (FLREA). Of the fees collected, 95 percent are locally reinvested to maintain and restore the facilities and services for outdoor recreation that people want and need. We propose permanent authority for the FLREA while clarifying its provisions and providing more consistency among agencies. This is an interagency proposal with the Department of the Interior.

For decades, the Forest Service has focused on protecting and restoring critical forested landscapes, not only on the national forests, but also on non-Federal lands. All 50 States and Puerto Rico prepared comprehensive State Forest Action Plans identifying the forested landscapes most in need of protection and restoration. Based on the State plans, the Forest Service has been working with State and other partners to tailor our programs accordingly, applying our limited resources to the most critical landscapes.

In fiscal year 2014, we began building on our successful State and Private Forestry Redesign initiative through a new program called Landscape Scale Restoration. The program allows States to continue pursuing innovative, landscape-scale projects across the Forest Health Management, State Fire Assistance, Forest Stewardship, and Urban and Community Forestry programs without the limitation of a specific mix of program funding. The program is designed to capitalize on the State Forest Action Plans to target the forested areas most in need of restoration treatments while leveraging partner funds. We propose funding the new program at almost \$24 million.

We are also using the State Forest Action Plans to identify and conserve forests critical for wildlife habitat and rural jobs through our Forest Legacy Program. Working through the States, we provide working forests with permanent protection by purchasing conservation easements from willing private landowners. As of February 2014, the Forest Legacy Program had protected more than 2.36 million acres of critical working forests, benefiting rural Americans in 42 States and Puerto Rico.

We propose \$53 million in discretionary funding for Forest Legacy and \$47 million in mandatory funds, from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), for a total of \$100 million. The increase is a key component of the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative to conserve critical landscapes and reconnect Americans to the outdoors through reauthorizing the LWCF as fully mandatory funds in fiscal year 2016.

In a similar vein, our Land Acquisition Program is designed to protect critical ecosystems and prevent habitat fragmentation. In accordance with the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative, we worked with the Department of the Interior to establish a Federal interagency Collaborative Landscape Planning Program, designed to leverage our joint investments and coordinate our efforts to protect intact, functioning ecosystems across entire landscapes. Land acquisitions are a proven value for the taxpayer, making it easier and less expensive for people to access their public lands—and easier and less expensive for the Forest Service to manage and restore the lands entrusted to our care. An analysis by The Trust for Public Land showed that every \$1 invested in Federal land acquisition returns \$4 to the taxpayer; taking returns beyond 10 years into account, the benefits are even greater.

The President's fiscal year 2015 budget proposes \$51 million in discretionary funding for our Federal Land Acquisition program and almost \$76.7 million in mandatory funding from the LWCF, for a combined total of \$127.7 million. These mandatory funds are part of the President's proposed LWCF reauthorization with fully mandatory funds starting in fiscal year 2016.

Working with the Department of the Interior, we propose to permanently authorize annual mandatory funding, without further appropriation or fiscal year limitation for the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture LWCF programs beginning in fiscal year 2015. Starting in 2016, \$900 million annually in permanent funds would be available. During the transition to full permanent funding in 2015, the budget proposes \$900 million in total LWCF funding, comprised of \$550 million in permanent and \$350 million discretionary funds.

Another legislative proposal listed in our fiscal year 2015 budget is an amendment to the Small Tracts Act to provide land conveyance authority for small parcels, less than 40 acres, to help resolve encroachments or trespasses. Proceeds from the sale of National Forest System lands under this proposed authority would be collected under the Sisk Act and used for future acquisitions and/or enhancement of existing public lands.

We are also helping communities use their wood resources for renewable energy. Through the Forest Service's Woody Biomass Utilization Grants Program, we are funding grants to develop community wood-to-energy plans and to acquire or upgrade wood-based energy systems and in fiscal year 2013, State and Private Forestry awarded 10 biomass grant awards totaling almost \$2.5 million to small businesses and community groups. In an interagency effort with the Rural Utilities

Service, Rural Housing Service, and Rural Business-Cooperative Service within Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development and the Farm Service Agency, the USDA Wood to Energy Initiative synergistically facilitates achievement of the cooperating agencies' goals. The Forest Service leverages its small amount of grant funds with the Rural Development's grant and loan programs by providing subject matter expertise and technical assistance in the early stages of project development, so the proponents can successfully compete for Rural Development's loans and grants. Our goal is lower energy bills, greater rural prosperity, and better environmental outcomes overall.

Better environmental outcomes result, in part, from removing woody materials to restore healthy, resilient forested landscapes. Many of the materials we remove have little or no market value, and by finding new uses for them through our Research and Development Programs, we can get more work done, producing more jobs and community benefits. Our Bioenergy and Biobased Products Research Program is leading the way in researching wood-based energy and products. Through discoveries made at our Forest Products Lab, woody biomass can now be used to develop cross-laminated timber for building components such as floors, walls, ceilings, and more. Completed projects have included the use of cross-laminated panels for 10-story high-rise buildings.

Over 83 percent of America's citizens now live in urban areas. For most Americans, their main experience of the outdoors comes from their local tree-lined streets, greenways, and parks, not to mention their own backyards. Fortunately, America has over 100 million acres of urban forests, an area the size of California. Through our Urban and Community Forestry Program, the Forest Service has benefited more than 7,000 communities, home to 196 million Americans, helping people reap the benefits they get from trees, including energy conservation, flood and pollution control, climate change mitigation, and open spaces for improved quality of life.

We are expanding our work with cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, working with an array of partners in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership to restore watersheds in urban areas. We are also helping communities acquire local landscapes for public recreation and watershed benefits through our Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program, which is funded at \$1.7 million in the fiscal year 2015 President's budget. Our goal is to help create a Nation of citizen-stewards committed to conserving their local forests and restoring them to health for all the benefits they get from them.

Our community focus supports the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative to achieve landscape-scale restoration objectives, connect more people to the outdoors, and support opportunities for outdoor recreation while providing jobs and income for rural communities. Building on existing partnerships, we have established a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps to help us increase the number of work and training opportunities for young people and veterans while accomplishing high-priority conservation and restoration work on public lands.

Managing Wildland Fires

The administration has worked this year to analyze and develop a strategy to address catastrophic fire risk. The budget calls for a change in how wildfire suppression is funded in order to reduce fire risk, to more holistically manage landscapes, and to increase the resiliency of the Nation's forests and rangelands and the communities that surround them. The cost of suppression has grown from 13 percent of the agency's budget just 10 years ago to over 40 percent in 2014. This increase in the cost of wildland fire suppression is subsuming the agency's budget and jeopardizing its ability to implement its full mission. The growth in the frequency, size, and severity of fires in recent years; along with the continual expansion of the wildland urban interface (WUI) have all increased the risks of catastrophic fires to life and property. Collectively these factors have resulted in suppression costs that exceeded amounts provided in annual appropriations requiring us to transfer funds from other programs to cover costs. This shift in funding is creating a loss in momentum for critical restoration and other resource programs as fire transfers deplete the budget by up to \$500 million annually.

The fiscal year 2015 budget proposes a new funding strategy that recognizes the negative effects of funding fire suppression as we have historically. The budget proposes funding catastrophic wildland fires similar to other disasters. Funded in part by additional budget authority provided through a budget cap adjustment for wildfire suppression, the budget proposes discretionary funding for wildland fire suppression at a level equal to 70 percent of the estimated 10-year average suppression costs, which reflects the level of spending associated with suppression of 99 percent of wildfires. In addition, the budget includes up to \$954 million to be available under a disaster funding cap adjustment to meet suppression needs above the base

appropriation. This proposed funding level includes 30 percent of the 10-year average of fire suppression costs and the difference to the upper limit of the 90th percentile range forecast for suppression costs for fiscal year 2015. This additional funding would be accessed with Secretarial declaration of need or imminent depletion of appropriated discretionary funds. This strategy provides increased certainty in addressing growing fire suppression needs, better safeguards non-suppression programs from transfers that diminish their effectiveness, and allows us to stabilize and invest in programs that more effectively restore forested landscapes, treat forests for the increasing effects of climate change, and prepare communities in the WUI for future wildfires.

Our evolving approach to managing wildland fire is integral to meeting our goals of safety, landscape-scale restoration, cross-boundary landscape conservation, and risk management. We continue to learn more about wildland fire, and we continue to apply what we learn through fire and risk management science in partnership with States, communities, and other Federal agencies. We strive to maximize our response capabilities and to support community efforts to reduce the threat of wildfire and increase ecosystem resilience. The agency has made great progress in its continued focus on risk-based decisionmaking when responding to wildfires, and in 2015 will continue this important work to better inform decisionmakers on the risks and trade-offs associated with wildfire management decisions. The budget also furthers efforts to focus hazardous fuels treatments on 1.4 million WUI acres focused on high priority areas identified in Community Wildfire Protection Plans.

Through our Hazardous Fuels Program, the Forest Service controls fuels by removing buildups of dead vegetation and by thinning overly dense forests that can be hazardous to lives, homes, communities, and wildland resources. From fiscal year 2001 to fiscal year 2013, the Forest Service treated about 33 million acres, an area larger than Mississippi. For fiscal year 2015, we propose \$358.6 million for our Hazardous Fuels program. We also propose performing non-WUI Hazardous Fuels work within the IRR line item in order to accomplish work more efficiently. With more than 70,000 communities in the WUI at risk from wildfire, the Forest Service is working through cross-jurisdictional partnerships to help communities become safer from wildfires. Through the Firewise program, the number of designated Firewise communities rose from 400 in fiscal year 2008 to nearly 1,000 in fiscal year 2013.

Our Hazardous Fuels program is also designed to help firefighters manage wildfires safely and effectively, and where appropriate, to use fire for resource benefits. Our Preparedness program is designed to help us protect lives, property, and wildland resources through an appropriate, risk-based response to wildfires. Preparedness has proven its worth; Fire Program Analysis, a strategic management tool, shows that every \$1 subtracted from preparedness funding adds \$1.70 to suppression costs because more fires escape to become large and large fires are more expensive to suppress. Unless we maintain an adequate level of preparedness, we risk substantial increases in overall fire management costs.

Airtankers are a critical part of our response to wildfire. Their use plays a crucial role in keeping some fires small and greatly assists in controlling the large fires. Accordingly, we are implementing a Large Airtanker Modernization Strategy to replace our aging fleet with next-generation airtankers. Our strategy, reflected in our budget request, would fund both the older aircraft still in operation and the next-generation airtankers currently under contract. It would also cover required cancellation fees and the C-130 Hercules aircraft transferred by the U.S. Coast Guard.

SAFETY AND INCLUSION

In addition to our focus on restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and managing wildland fire, we continue our agency efforts to become a safer, more diverse, and more inclusive organization.

Accomplishing our work often takes us into high-risk environments. For that reason, for several years now, we have undertaken a learning journey to become a safer organization. Every one of our employees has taken training to become more attuned to safety issues and the need to manage personal risk. As part of this effort, safety means recognizing the risk and managing it appropriately. Our goal is to become a zero-fatality organization through a constant, relentless focus on safety.

Recognizing that more than 83 percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas, the Forest Service is outreaching to urban and underserved communities to introduce more people to opportunities to get outdoors, to participate in NFS land management, and to engage in conservation work in their own communities. Part of this inclusiveness is creating new opportunities to come into contact with and to hiring individuals from various backgrounds that might not otherwise be exposed to other Forest Service programs.

COST SAVINGS

The Forest Service is committed to achieving the greatest benefits for the taxpayer at the least cost. Mindful of the need for savings, we have taken steps to cut operating costs. Taking advantage of new technologies, we have streamlined and centralized our financial, information technology, and human resources operations to gain efficiencies and save costs. We continue to work with other USDA agencies under the Blueprint for Stronger Service to develop strategies for greater efficiencies in key business areas. In fiscal year 2013, we saved millions of dollars through additional measures to promote efficiencies, ranging from an \$800,000 annual savings through consolidation of local telephone service accounts to right-sizing our existing Microsoft software licenses, which yielded over \$4 million in savings in fiscal year 2013. In fiscal year 2013, we also instituted measures that will yield \$100 million in cost pool savings by fiscal year 2015.

Another cost saving highlight is the Forest Service completion of the design and construction for the renovation of the Yates Building on schedule, and within budget. On January 13, 2014, following completion of the renovation, all 762 Washington Office located employees apart from International Programs were finally located in the same building. Beside these benefits, this move is expected to save \$5 million annually in leasing costs.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

For more than a century, the Forest Service has served the American people by making sure that their forests and grasslands deliver a full range of values and benefits. America receives enormous value from our programs and activities, including hundreds of thousands of jobs and annual contributions to the economy worth many times more than our entire annual discretionary budget. Especially in these tough economic times, Americans benefit tremendously from investing in Forest Service programs and activities.

Now we are facing some of the greatest challenges in our history. Invasive species, climate change effects, regional drought and watershed degradation, fuel buildups and severe wildfires, habitat fragmentation and loss of open space, and devastating outbreaks of insects and disease all threaten the ability of America's forests and grasslands to continue delivering the ecosystem services that Americans want and need. In response, the Forest Service is increasing the pace and scale of ecological restoration. We are working to create healthy, resilient forest and grassland ecosystems capable of sustaining and delivering clean air and water, habitat for wildlife, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and many other benefits.

Our budget request focuses on the public's highest priorities for restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and safely managing wildland fire while providing an effective emergency response. Our requested budget will enable us to address the growing extent and magnitude of our management challenges and the mix of values and benefits that the public expects from the national forests and grasslands. We will continue to lead the way in improving our administrative operations for greater efficiency and effectiveness in mission delivery. Our research will continue to solve complex problems by creating innovative science and technology for the protection, sustainable management, and use of all forests, both public and private, for the benefit of the American people. Moreover, we are working ever more effectively to optimize our response to cross-cutting issues by integrating our programs and activities.

We can achieve these priorities through partnerships and collaboration. Our budget priorities highlight the need to strengthen service through cooperation, collaboration, and public-private partnerships that leverage our investments to reach shared goals. Through strategic partnerships, we can accomplish more work while also yielding more benefits for all Americans, for the sake of all generations to come.

This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or the subcommittee members have for me.

WILDLAND FIRE

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Chief.

Mr. Dixon, do you have any comment? Thank you very much.

Every year, Chief, we sit down at this moment, which is, coincidentally, before the fire season and we anticipate what it will be like, and it would help us if you could give us your sense of what

you expect going forward, particularly as we are all aware of, droughts in many parts of the West.

Can you give us a sense of what you expect? And even with the significant resources you are asking for, do you think they will be adequate?

Mr. TIDWELL. We are anticipating a very active fire season this year, especially in the southwest.

In California, if you are watching the news, it has a record drought, some of the driest conditions, and this follows the driest year on record in California and last year, but it is just one of the areas. We have had to bring on additional resources earlier this year to be prepositioned to be able to deal with that in California. So we do have the resources that we need to be able to deal with the suppression issue.

BUDGET CHALLENGES

However, we do expect that the cost of this fire season is going to exceed the funding that we have available this year. You can anticipate that I will be informing the subcommittee of the need to be able to transfer money. That is based on the information that we have this year at this point in time. So it is going to be very similar to what we had last year, and some indications, it is going to be even more active than the fire season we had last year.

FIRE SUPPRESSION CAP ADJUSTMENT

Senator REED. Thank you.

In terms of the approach that you are taking which, in a very simplified way, would put some of the funding into the emergency category and the bulk of it remaining under our purview, and has to be offset by other programs. That requires coordination with several committees, including the budget committee since it is a budget issue here, the authorizing committees, and obviously our committee.

Can you tell us what you have been doing to reach out to these other committees and try to make the case?

Mr. TIDWELL. Mr. Chairman, we have been meeting with the staffs and members of all three of these committees that you have mentioned over the last 3 or 4 months now, to be able to help them understand the problem, and then in addition, how this solution would work.

I need to stress that this would not increase spending for fire suppression by shifting a portion of our fires into the natural disaster category. It would allow us to access the disaster fund that has already been appropriated. All it does is stop the transfer. It does not increase costs. It does not score.

This is one of the reasons that we feel very strongly that this is a good approach. We definitely want to work with this subcommittee, the authorizing committees and, of course, the Budget Committee on ways to even improve what is being proposed at this time in the introduced legislation.

But we feel it is a very good starting place.

Senator REED. Thank you.

And Chief, I understand that the \$954 million requested within the disaster cap is made up of two parts. It is 30 percent of the

regular 10-year average and the second part is to project an amount above the 10-year average that would be necessary based on a new 2-year forecast.

Can you tell us how you arrived at the 30 percent level? And also, how you developed the new 2-year forecasting model?

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, we have always had the 2-year forecasting model since we have been responding to Congress on the FLAME Report, where we send up our forecast every quarter. What it is based on is just looking at data from the last 30-some years, and it is a regression model that our scientists use to do the best job to actually predict what we can expect this coming year.

The problem with it is when it is 2 years out, for fiscal year 2015, that model shows that we are 90 percent confident that the suppression costs will be somewhere between \$770 million and \$1.9 billion. Now, as we move closer into 2015, we will definitely be able to have a much better forecast. But that is the challenge that we have had.

The 10-year average was something we all agreed to. It has proven not to work out because 11 of the last 14 years, we have exceeded the 10-year average in our funding. Even with the forecasts 2 years out, it is just so difficult because there are so many weather patterns that can shift for next year. That is what makes this so difficult.

That is why we feel that if this is a better approach, to set up so that there is a certain type of fire, we are talking about the large, complex fires, the fires that threaten communities, we would be able to access this disaster funding. When we exhaust all the appropriated funds, then anything after that would still be able to access the disaster fund.

But those are the challenges that we have.

Senator REED. Thank you, Chief.

Senator Murkowski.

ROADLESS RULE

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Chief, as you know, due to your visit with me to the State last summer, and I appreciate you taking the time. I know Alaskans appreciated the opportunity to show you on the ground what we are dealing with there in the southeast, in the Tongass.

But as you know, most of the mills there in the southeast have closed due to lack of timber supply. Energy projects whether it is hydroelectric or potential geothermal projects, could really make a difference in a region that struggles with high energy costs. In some of our smaller village communities, you are paying 40 cents to 50 cents a kilowatt hour and yet, we are surrounded with amazing hydropower potential, and in certain areas, geothermal potential. But opportunities are tied up because of red tape, whether it is policies coming out of the Federal Government or the impact of the roadless rule.

You have indicated to me that you think that there is some flexibility that you have to act and you have got to avoid some of those areas that are so impacted by the roadless. But I am passing a map out to my colleagues here that details the roadless area inven-

tory within the Tongass. 91 percent of the Tongass is considered roadless; 9.6 million acres is roadless. So we are bound.

We cannot access an area to put in a hydro facility, whether it is small hydro, lake tap, whatever it is we are trying to do, geothermal opportunities. We are all talking about the great policies that this Administration is trying to advance when it comes to renewables. But if you cannot build the project because the roadless rule does not allow you to put a road there, the only way you can do it is by helicopter. Well, colleagues, figure that one out. Pretty danged expensive to build a hydro facility or do anything if you are operating completely by helicopter. So we are trying to figure this out.

BIG THORNE SALE

You know, Chief, that last year was not a good year for Region 10. It was the worst performing region, just 16.8 percent of the target was accomplished. Region 10 has only sold about 30 million board feet per year since 2008.

So, again, in my opening statement, I mentioned Big Thorne. We are all hoping and praying that Big Thorne comes through and Big Thorne has been sitting since September. You have indicated to me that that is how we are going to get to this transition is second growth.

So can you give me some update on when we may see the Big Thorne Sale offered? How much volume of the original 150 million board feet will be offered? And really, from a broader perspective, how are you going to overcome this decline? Is it just done? Is it just over in the Tongass, that we will not be able to see any aspect of a timber industry anymore? Is it done? Because if you say that it is, we are going to have a timber war here all over again.

We cannot give up on this region. We cannot give up on a region that has opportunity and has potential, but is being denied because of policies from our own Federal Government.

So first, Big Thorne and then, second, how are we going to arrest this decline?

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, Senator, we are committed to completing the Big Thorne project. We are in the process, with the region finishing up their draft Supplemental Information Report. They are going to be sitting down with the appellants to share that additional information around their concerns. I am optimistic that they will be able to address that.

They may have to, as part of addressing the appeals, drop a unit or two. That is always something we can look at. But I am confident that the majority of that project will go through.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Do you know when? Give me an estimate because I am not sure we can hold on. I am not sure we can hold on much longer.

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, they are completing the Supplemental Information Report and they are working with the State to provide some information about the wolf species, that is of a concern up there. I think they are close to completing that.

They will be sitting down with the appellants, and then, hopefully we will be able to resolve it, and then be able to go forward.

Senator MURKOWSKI. What if we cannot?

Mr. TIDWELL. We are planning on doing it this year along with the other timber sales that we have planned. So the target this year is 70 million plus the Big Thorne project.

Senator MURKOWSKI. 70 million plus Big Thorne. You anticipate that Big Thorne is going to be 150 million board feet. But realistically, I mean, we have not seen, we sold 30 million board feet per year since 2008.

How are we going to get to the numbers that you are talking about? I mean, are they just numbers on paper?

Mr. TIDWELL. No, they are not on paper. Senator, with Big Thorne, the staff have worked so hard on that project.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I know.

Mr. TIDWELL. It will not be 150, but it should be in the range of 100 million, plus what we plan to go forward with. As you have pointed out, this is essential that we provide this bridge timber for our plan to transition to second growth.

I think that is still the right plan, but we need to be able to do projects like Big Thorne. We need to be able to do the projects like Wrangell this year. To be able to have that amount of timber and to be able to bridge during the times until we are ready to move into the second growth as being the predominant harvest up there; to be able to sustain the wood products industry for all the reasons that you have mentioned; and to be able to provide jobs. It needs to be part of the economic activity in that State.

The other part of it is hydro. We are working on the hydro projects. They are a great benefit, especially in the Southeast. But as you also know, we are having to ship wood pellets, either out of Seattle to bring them up to Ketchikan to convert using the biomass for electricity. When we see all that and the trees there, the idea that we cannot have a pellet plant right there, to be able to provide renewable energy for those facilities and not ship it out. But that is another reason it is just essential for us to be able to maintain the industry.

So you have my commitment that we are going to get Big Thorne done. We are going to move forward on the sales this year. And at the same time, still continue to move forward with the transition.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, Chief, my time has expired. I will have more questions in the second round.

But you keep talking about these sales that will be the bridge, but in order for a bridge to work, it has to be anchored to something on either side. Right now, there is not much to anchor within the southeastern timber economy because we cannot get any sales moving. We cannot get any product at all.

And so, when we talk about transition, when we talk about bridges, we still have to have an anchor, and you are not giving us that anchor yet.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. Senator Tester.

AIRTANKERS

Senator TESTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, again, for being here, fellows.

Chief Tidwell, you and I have talked about the recent struggles the Forest Service has faced in putting together a next generation

air tanker fleet, and I do appreciate the attention the Forest Service has given to the matter.

I am concerned about reports that some of the contractors that were not ready to go last year may not be ready to go this year. We are 3 years into this gig and I do not know that we have gotten a lot out of it.

That being said, can you give me an update of where folks stand in terms of getting the planes in the air to combat wildfires?

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, we will have an adequate number of air tankers again this year to be able to deal with the projected fire season. It will be a combination of the legacy aircraft that are under contract, and then we are expecting to have seven of the next generation aircraft also flying this year.

We are also working closely with the Air Force and the Air Force Reserve to have the Modular Airborne FireFighting System (MAFFs) units. They have already started their training to be ready, and then we also have our agreement with Canada to bring down their planes if we need to, to get through this year, and then hopefully, we will be in a better position in 2015 to have more of the next generation aircraft online.

Senator TESTER. So what I heard you just say, and correct me if I am wrong, you are going to have seven next generation planes ready to be up in the air this year?

Mr. TIDWELL. That is what we are hearing from the contractors.

Senator TESTER. Okay.

Mr. TIDWELL. That is what they said they will deliver.

Senator TESTER. And so, come July 1, there will be seven next generation ready to go.

Mr. TIDWELL. That is what they have told us.

Senator TESTER. Okay. Last year, they were not, and I think they might have told you the same thing. Were there any ramifications/repercussions for those folks who failed to meet those deadlines?

Mr. TIDWELL. We followed our contract procedures to send them cure notices. They respond to that. We are working with these contractors because we need the planes, and as you saw last year, it became more difficult for them to be able to make the modifications to the aircraft that they bought to be able to meet our tests and, at the same time, be safe aircraft that the FAA will certify after they have made the modifications to the aircraft. It is a year later, and they are making progress.

Senator TESTER. I would just say this, Chief, I mean, I would hold their feet to the fire. This is not nuclear physics; this kind of stuff is not that complicated and, quite frankly, I think they knew exactly what they were getting into when they were awarded the contracts. And I personally do not think they had any—I think they fully knew that they were not going to be able to get those planes up in the air; let us just put it that way. And they knew we would be very forgiving too.

And so, I do not point the finger at you. I just think that this is a common practice across Government. People contract with us and then they say, "Well, it costs much more money," and we cut them a check, and I think that kind of stuff needs to stop. If they

do not provide the service, they ought not have the contract. That is my soapbox for you.

Last year, we kind of heard the same thing, and I just want to point out that the Forest Service, I think, their dates for next generation are not certain. They are to be determined, TBD. Is that correct?

Senator TESTER. For the next generation.

Mr. TIDWELL. For this year?

Senator TESTER. Yes.

Mr. TIDWELL. We have asked the contractors that the planes need to be flying, passed all the tests by July 1st, and we have a schedule of the dates that they will be bringing those on.

Senator TESTER. Okay. So thank you for that. So you are telling me that you have dates certain from these contractors when these planes are going to be up.

Mr. TIDWELL. They have provided us dates, yes.

Senator TESTER. And what happens if they do not meet those dates?

Mr. TIDWELL. We will send them a cure notice and they have to explain then what steps they are going to take to be able to bring the planes on.

Senator TESTER. Okay. Is there anything you can do if they do not meet those dates? I know we need planes, but they also need our business too.

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes. We are working with these contractors because if we cancel these contracts, then we do not have any planes for sure. Even though it is taking them longer, late last year, we got another one of the planes flying. There is one of the companies that indicated they will have two of their planes ready. We know that there are two more planes that will pass the tests, and we can be flying those.

So it has been frustrating, and I share your frustration. I have to deal with it.

Senator TESTER. And I would just say, I get it, but if they know that they do not have to play by the rules, and yet, they are still going to get the contract, that is crazy. I mean, that is just flat crazy. I still believe that competition will fill that void and so, I think they need to be held accountable. I think the taxpayers expect that, quite frankly and I think everybody on this panel does too.

I am going to stick around for the next round of questions, so I will let my 30 seconds go. But once again, thank you for your work, Chief. And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. Senator Blunt.

COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PROGRAM

Senator BLUNT. Thank you, Chairman.

Chief Tidwell, our State, Missouri, is ranked No. 3 by the Forest Service in terms of economic impact of forestry on the economy. I want to talk a little bit about the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project.

I met with the regional forester, Kathleen Atkinson, in December, a year ago, and I had been to the site where you were doing a large burn, I think it was a 10,000 acre burn. Looked like, to the

farm boy in me, that there was lots of damage to the tall trees you were trying to save and lots of potential erosion on the ground.

I asked for a couple of things then, one of which I have not gotten yet. One was any proof that we felt that this would really work. I believe the goal was to restore the forest to some moment that the Service has decided was exactly the right balance of trees in the forest which, I think, we could probably argue about. And whether or not the forest industry could go in and mark trees and harvest those trees before you burnt them. I did not receive much in specifics on that. On marking the trees, I think the answer was, no. You did not think that was possible.

But there was a meeting recently with the local Forest Service with Congressman Smith and Congressman Luetkemeyer and my staff in the State. And my understanding now is that those funds will not be used for burns, but will be used to hire new personnel to help with harvesting in the coming fiscal year. Is that right?

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, with the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program there is always a mix of activities. Yes, this coming year, there is going to be more mechanical treatment, more timber harvest that will be coming off of there.

The purpose of the prescribed fire is to create a much more resilient forest that can deal with concerns with insect and disease, et cetera. When there are merchantable trees, we always want to get in there and harvest those trees that need to be removed. A prescribed fire is to just provide more of the ecological system that we have, so that it is more resilient. So it is usually a combination, and often, we do a timber harvest and then follow that with a prescribed burn to reduce some of the residual material and reduce the concern for potential fire. It takes both. But this coming year, I do know that on that project, they are going to be focused on doing timber harvest and not the prescribed burning.

Senator BLUNT. Okay. Well, that is helpful. And then there is a University of Missouri study on the impact of that program and forestry generally. Are you aware of that and are you all cooperating in that?

Mr. TIDWELL. I am not aware of that specific study.

Senator BLUNT. Would you follow up on that? I think your people on the ground said that they were beginning to work with the University of Missouri to talk about the impact there.

And I think the estimate is we lose 50 million board feet of timber in the Mark Twain Forest every year, and we harvest about 38 million. Doing a better job of harvesting the trees that are going to be lost would be something that, I know, you care about and I do too, and I hope we do that.

Do you have some information there, Mr. Dixon, on the study I asked about?

Mr. DIXON. Our northern research station is working with the University of Missouri to detail the socioeconomic modeling related to the impacts of our Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. So we are working in conjunction with the University.

Senator BLUNT. Well, since both of those things have been verified, I feel better about the year we are going into.

I do think on the greater issue of the burning program, what I would like to see, and maybe we have a year now to see if you

could produce that for me, any evidence that that really is going to work in restoring the forest area you are burning to where you think it is.

It seems to me having visited there, that the trees coming back up are the same trees you burned down, as opposed to some different look that tries to capture a moment in time which, I think, is pretty arguable too; that that was the perfect moment for the forest, and we go to all this effort to make that happen. And you do have, when you remove all of the groundcover, obviously, erosion and other things are a problem that would not be otherwise. I may have had my two biggest questions answered here.

Personnel-wise are you using the new personnel that you are hiring to try to identify the timber that can be harvested? Is that what I understood you to say?

Mr. TIDWELL. Well Senator, each year, staff put together the program of work, and we get a lot of our work done with our seasonal workforce. So as we move into a year, we are going to be doing more timber harvest, we are going to be hiring more seasonals to do the marking, et cetera, versus maybe a prescribed burn.

But the thing I need to stress is that with the reduction of our staffing over the last decade, it has just really limited our ability to be able to manage these forests. To be able to do the work where there is now strong support across the country, especially in these Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration projects where people understand what needs to be done on the landscape.

But I will tell you, we are just so limited in what we are able to do. Our staff are doing a great job to be able to produce as much as they are. But with this budget request, where we are asking for additional money to do more forest restoration, do more hazardous fuels funding, and this is the first time that I have been up here in quite a few years in a position to be able to ask for that increase. That is what will really make a difference.

So we have the collaboratives in place, folks understand what work needs to be done. Now is the time for us to add some additional capacity into the system so that we can get more work done.

And Senator, we will share with you the monitoring information from that project, and also the research that we have that guides the type of projects that we are putting on the ground. We have been doing this work for many years, and we will provide that information.

Not every project accomplishes every objective we set out. That is why we monitor these. But just like in our hazardous fuels projects, 90 percent of those meet their objectives to reduce the threat of fire and reduce the severity of fire.

So we will provide you with that additional information.

Senator BLUNT. I may have some other questions later, Chairman.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator Blunt.

Senator Merkley, please.

FIRE SUPPRESSION CAP ADJUSTMENT

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Chief Tidwell and Mr. Dixon. Appreciate your testimony.

First I just want to thank you very much for your support and advocacy of changing the way that we address funding of fighting forest fires in a regular budget, the 70 percent rolling average over a 10-year period, and then doing the rest under emergency. It makes a great deal of sense. We have just been putting all our resources in the firefighting end and failing to treat emergencies as emergencies, and draining the Forest Service, and then trying to refund the Forest Service to do your regular work, which is so critical, whether it is planning for timber sales or maintaining the forest parks.

So anything I can do to work in partnership with you all, and with this committee, and with the Energy and Natural Resources committee, we are certainly happy to do.

WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

I wanted to mention that one community in Oregon, the community of Ashland, would be a great candidate for further hazardous fuels funding in their Wildland Urban Interface, and I will certainly follow up. They have partially completed their forest resiliency project, and just have a ways to go, and very important to their watershed for their area.

TIMBER SALES

I wanted to turn to timber sales that are done by dealing with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planning backlog and just the challenge of having the interdisciplinary teams necessary to complete the planning. The backlog in NEPA planning work in Oregon has presented itself as a concern to me. Perhaps you are aware of it, and the addition of more technical experts to those teams would be helpful.

But are you aware of this challenge, and any particular thoughts about it?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes, Senator, we are, and it is one of the challenges we face, not only in your State, but across the country, to be able to have the necessary capacity to be able to increase the pace and scale of restoring our forests.

We do have a great example, in the eastern part of your State, on the Malheur National Forest where we have been able to put that 10-year project together, and we are doing more and more work now where we are looking at large landscapes.

Instead of looking at 1,000 acres at a time, we are now looking at tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of acres at a time and doing one Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and we are finding this to be much more efficient and more effective. It lays out a program of work for the next 10 years and provides a certainty to the industry, and it actually is saving us a lot of money and a lot of time in our NEPA process.

We are to the point where for us to really go to where we need to be, and I use the project in eastern Oregon, for us to change the fire regime, we need to double the number of acres we have been treating in the last couple of years, and we need to do that for over a decade to really make a difference.

That is just an example of the challenge that we have, and we do not need to double our budget to be able to do that work, but

we do need to be able to increase our capacity so that we can expand. And that is one of the reasons that I feel so strongly about our budget request this year because we are asking for some modest increases to be able to do forest management work using Integrated Resource Restoration funds and then, of course, a significant increase with hazardous fuels which often accomplishes two objectives: reduces fuels and at the same time produces saw timber for mills.

COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

Senator MERKLEY. I must say, there is an ecstatic community in John Day, Oregon and the Forest Service was instrumental in developing the innovation of using a service contract rather than a harvest contract to have that 10-year plan. That mill has hired, I believe, it is about 50 additional full time workers, living wage jobs, huge, huge for a small mill community and certainly a model to be replicated.

And in that regard, I did want to praise the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, the major part of that, the issues, the frame up with NEPA, all involved in that. We are seeking additional funding. You are seeking additional funding for it. I certainly am very supportive of that.

But if we are able to maintain at least the 40 million; I do not know if we will make it to the 60 million. I would love it if we can. But will we be able to continue those projects that are already underway, like those three projects?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes, Senator. We will be able to continue the projects that are underway, but what we found at the CFLR programs to be so effective, and it has so much support behind it. That is why we are asking for that increase to be able to expand that work.

WILDFIRE DISASTER FUNDING ACT

And Senator, I do want to thank you for being a cosponsor on the Wildfire Disaster Fund because that is key to a lot of things that we are talking about, so I really appreciate your support and work on that.

FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET

Senator MERKLEY. Two more things I would like to mention in my 1 minute left. One is the Columbia River Gorge Economic Development Fund.

At a time that that scenic area was established, there was a commitment from the Federal Government to fund \$10 million of economic development in the Gorge. Some of that has been funded, but there is a balance left on it of approximately \$2 million. I want to encourage the Forest Service to find a way to complete that commitment to the community. We are 28 years later and they could benefit from that.

And second, just to put in a note that in terms of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), there are a lot of projects in Oregon that would merit from their attention and look forward to following up on that conversation.

Mr. TIDWELL. We will work on both of those efforts, and we will get back to you on the LWCF projects.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

Senator REED. Senator Begich.

BIG THORNE SALE

Senator BEGICH. Thank you very much. Thanks for being here. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I know my colleague, Senator Murkowski, asked you several questions on the Big Thorne Timber Sale. So can I just ask, these might be very quick, just so I get the understanding.

I know it is delayed. I know you are under an administrative appeal process. So I have two questions, maybe three. Is there any information, I know there was, at one point, the State of Alaska had to get some information for your administrative appeal.

Has everyone supplied the information you need that is external to your operation to deal with that appeal?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes, Senator. It is my understanding the State has provided that information. It is going to be put into that Supplemental Information Report and then shared with the appellates.

Senator BEGICH. Okay. So you have everything external that you need?

Mr. TIDWELL. That is my understanding.

Senator BEGICH. Okay.

Second, do you have the necessary staffing levels to ensure that you can move forward with resolving the appeal issue, but also, let us assume that it moves the right direction, to then make the sale happen?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes, we do. We have the staffing to be able to finish and implement Big Thorne, and at the same time, move forward with this year's program of work.

Senator BEGICH. Okay. And this led me, I thought I just had two, or three, on this one.

And that is, can you put in more specific terms—not right now, but in a memo back to myself and my colleague and the rest of the committee if they have any interest in that—is just a range of timetable that you think, based on the appeal and where we you might end up at the final here? Because obviously, this is a pretty big issue, as you know. It is important for the mill to have this contract resolved sooner than later.

But can you give us something more definitive in dates or ranges of dates that you think you can get down this ladder?

Mr. TIDWELL. We can provide that to you and the rest of the committee, if they are interested in that.

[The information follows:]

The Big Thorne Record of Decision received a number of administrative appeals. Upon review of those appeals, the Regional Forester upheld the Forest Supervisor's decision, with direction to address whether the information and conclusions contained in the August 2013 statement of retired State of Alaska wildlife biologist Dr. David Person, is consistent with the analysis in the Big Thorne Final Environmental Statement and Record of Decision.

The work necessary to address Dr. Person's Statement has been ongoing since the Regional Forester issued her appeal decision on September 30, 2014. The Wolf Task Force, comprised of State and Federal wildlife biologists, is reviewing the information and conclusions contained in Dr. Person's Statement. Additionally, the Forest

Supervisor is also reviewing the Tongass Forest Plan's legacy and old growth reserves standards and guidelines to ensure the Big Thorne Record of Decision is consistent with Forest Plan direction.

Once these reviews are completed, the findings will be summarized in a draft Supplemental Information Report (SIR), which will be provided to appellants and appropriate State and Federal agencies for a 30-day review and comment period. Any comments received will be considered prior to issuance of a final SIR by the Forest Supervisor. It is unknown what additional issues may be raised by the appellants or agencies in comments submitted on the draft SIR; any new information that is submitted could require additional analysis to be completed by the Tongass National Forest prior to issuing the final SIR.

With this in mind, the following is the current schedule for the remaining administrative processes for the Big Thorne timber sale project:

May 31	Draft Supplemental Information Statement (SIR) released to the Appellants and appropriate State and Federal agencies for 30-day review period.
June 30	End of Review period for Draft SIR, start of review and response to comments.
August 20	Final Decision and SIR completed and released.
August 30	If no units dropped, final appraisal completed and Sale advertised.
September 30	If units dropped, prepare final cruise, final appraisal completed and Sale advertised.

Senator BEGICH. Okay. Fantastic. If you would do that, that would be great.

RECREATION AND TOURISM

Second, I want to move to the tourism recreation budgets, and this is of grave concern to me. I know there is a leader's document on the regional level that indicates that they will be substantially reducing its support or dropping its support for recreational tourism within your operations.

And as you know, the Alaska travel industry, or maybe you do not know, but the Alaska travel industry has brought forward a resolution concerned about this too. As you know, it is big business for us, especially in the southeast where there is an enormous amount of travelers. We get about 800,000 cruise ship industry travelers, 1.9 million overall travelers to the State. And, of course, our forests are incredible. It supports our tourism business in southeast alone, about 10,000 jobs and about \$1 billion in annual spending. So pretty, as you know, pretty significant and I am concerned about this leader's document indicating this.

So the question I have is, one, is that moving forward in full force, what your leadership document has? Or is there a number that you are still trying to struggle with to put into the budget to keep it level, at least for the funding regarding tourism and recreation, in regards to your budget? Is there a number that you need to put back in to make it whole, or is just now the policy that this is no longer a priority, and money or not, we are not interested?

Can you give me a—obviously from my perspective, you are a huge landowner along with many other Federal agencies, and when you decide not to use it for something like this that is an economic driver, that is a diversifier of economy, especially in southeast, it is very problematic.

BUDGET CHALLENGES

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, we are not shifting our priority about how important recreation is. It provides more economic activity, sup-

ports more jobs than all the other activities on the national forest put together.

What you are seeing in Alaska is just the result of what has been happening to our budget over the years of having to put more and more of our budget into dealing with fire suppression. Under a constrained budget, we keep having to reduce all these other programs. Recreation is another key one.

So the regions have to make some really tough choices based on the realities of the budgets that we see right now, to be able to prioritize what work they can do, where is the best place to put their limited recreation money to be able to provide for the most economic benefit. Those are just an example of how difficult these choices are.

RECREATION AND TOURISM

Senator BEGICH. But let me, I appreciate that. I understand that, but as you indicated, you had some incremental movements in the budget this year, and I understand why. Fire suppression is a critical piece and what you have done is a smart move, actually planning for what really is going to happen, which I give you a lot of credit for that, and commend the agency.

But what is the amount, or can you get to me, what the amount of resource you would need to put it back into being held harmless or, at least, flat compared to last year? Can you get me that information so I understand what this increment is that is lacking for this promotion, this activity around tourism and recreation?

Mr. TIDWELL. I will tell you that the region is dealing with about a 30 percent reduction in the recreation funding from what they received a few years ago. It is not quite at that level nationally. It is more about 15 percent down.

But I can tell you—there is not any fewer people wanting to come to see the national forests. And especially in your State, it is such a big economic driver.

Senator BEGICH. Yes, I mean, you are making my argument. So give me those numbers and especially if nationally it is 15 percent and in our region it is 30 percent, then we are not being treated fairly. That is a whole other debate, which, you kind of opened that door, but I will just leave that over here for a second.

If you can get me that information, I want to know what it will take to get that, at least a reasonable approach because as you just said, the biggest use of the Forest Service is recreation and tourism. And for Alaska, it is, again, your lands, the Bureau of Land Management lands, and other lands are huge to the promotion of our business. So if you could get me that, I would greatly appreciate that.

ROADLESS RULE

Then last, I will not take any more time. I will not be able to be here for a second round, but I know you are working on some issues around roadless rules, and we can have a different conversation at a later time.

Mr. TIDWELL. Thank you.

Senator BEGICH. Thank you very much for everything you guys are doing.

AIRTANKERS

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Senator Begich.

Chief, last year through the Defense bill, you received C-130 aircraft and the Air Force is in the process of modifying them at this moment.

Do you have any money in this year's budget for costs associated with that modification? Will you be able to take these aircraft and incorporate them quickly without additional resources?

Mr. TIDWELL. The funding that is necessary to basically replace the wing boxes on those planes, plus to retrofit them for retardant delivery is actually part of the Defense Authorization Act. The Air Force has the adequate funding to be able to do the work on those planes.

So it is not in our budget, but it is in theirs and those planes have to be put into the line up with everything else the Air Force is working on. They also have some of their own C-130s that they need to do the same modifications on.

They have told us that we should receive the first plane next year, and then the other planes will be coming in the years after that.

Senator REED. Very good.

In 2012, you were talking about your Modernization Strategy, and you were calling for between 18 and 28 large airtankers, and you are getting new aircraft and leasing aircraft. You have the C-130s coming online.

Are you on your trajectory to have your capacity, your adequate capacity?

Mr. TIDWELL. We are. I would say we are probably a year behind where we wanted to be at this time. But with these C-130 planes that we will have in the next few years that will add to that. So if you add those planes to where we plan to be with the next generation aircraft that we are on the right trajectory.

The other thing is we also have to factor in the P-2s that are being flown under our legacy contract. We are expecting to have those planes for 4 years and they will probably be done. That is why it is essential that we move forward with the next generation, and at the same time, the C-130 planes. That will provide seven aircraft. We will contract for the operation and maintenance of those aircraft, but it will be a key part of our future fleet.

Senator REED. Just finally, you have a \$145 million item within the fire preparedness budget and it is designated "Air Modernization."

If it is not for aircraft physical modification, what is it for?

Mr. TIDWELL. It reflects the cost of the next generation airtankers. They will cost us, based on what we saw last year with the ones that we flew last year, about 2.8 times as much as the legacy aircraft. However, they are faster. They are safer. They can deliver more retardant. But that is just a reflection of, as we move into these more modern aircraft, that it is going to be a significant increase in the cost.

Senator REED. Essentially, it is a contracting cost.

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Chief.

Senator Murkowski.

ROADLESS RULE

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief, talking about the situation with the roadless rule right now following the Ninth Circuit decision, as I mentioned, I think we know that there is still more legal wrangling and procedure before the exemption will definitively apply on the Tongass.

Once that is complete, and I would hope that the Forest Service would defend the exemption in any subsequent proceedings, I think it will give you that flexibility that you and I have talked about.

But can you explain to me this morning how the Ninth Circuit ruling will impact—whether it is future timber sales; I mentioned the renewable projects, whether it is our hydro projects; possible transmission lines; mining roads such as those that we looked at when we were flying over Prince of Wales, the Bogan Road, the Niblack projects—can you speak to how this roadless exemption will impact effectively what you are doing within the Tongass right now?

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, what we have planned for this year in the Tongass, with or without the exemption, it will have no effect. All the projects that we have planned to go forward with, the mining projects that you just mentioned, the timber sale, the Big Thorne, the Wrangell sales, those will all go forward with or without any exemption.

We will have to wait and see. As you mentioned, I think there is still some lengthy court time in front of us before we actually see where we end up, if the exemption will be reinstated or not.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Is the Forest Service going to defend the exemption?

Mr. TIDWELL. I am not going to comment on litigation until I actually see what comes out of this process.

I will make the commitment that I want to resolve the issue with roadless. I spent 37 years, my entire career, dealing with this and I can at least, in most places now, see we have resolved the issue. Alaska is the last place.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, we thought we had resolved it. You and I both know, we thought we had resolved that back in 2003. I, too, want to finally and fully get this done. I, too, want to see us be able to access an area whether it is for energy resources, for access to road projects, transmissions, but we have got to get this roadless issue resolved, and we need that flexibility that you have been talking about.

TIMBER HARVEST

Let me ask a couple of other questions here in this same vein. This past winter, you announced that you are appointing this public advisory council under the Federal Advisory Council Act (FACA), to consider these changes within the Tongass policy, particularly implementation of how you move towards second growth.

Can you give me a quick status here on when this 15-member group will be announced, when it is going to start meeting, and then the composition? Because what I want to make sure is that you are going to have members that would be part of this, that re-

flect a diversity of views and not just necessarily one part of the community there.

Mr. TIDWELL. We are in the process. Shortly, we will be starting to review the applicants that have submitted their request to be considered. I am hoping by the end of May, we can actually announce the 15 people that will be on this.

I can guarantee it will have a diverse set of interests. It is essential for us to do that. And based on our past success, when we have taken the time with these formal—these FACA committees, to me, are formalized collaborative effort—to get that diverse set of interests. It has been remarkable what they have been able to reach agreement on and to be able to deal with some of the more difficult issues.

We saw it with the Idaho roadless of Senator Risch, who was with the other committee, if he was here, he would be talking about that. The work that we are seeing with the FACA committee we have on our planning rule to put the directives together. They have taken on the most difficult issues and actually, I have been so impressed. They have been able to resolve those and be able to make recommendations that we can move forward to implement.

So based on my personal experience, this FACA group that we are putting together, it is absolutely essential that it provides that diverse set of interests so that we can be able to use that group's recommendations and be able to move forward with making the adjustments to the Tongass plan.

RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOURCES

Senator MURKOWSKI. Let me ask about the adjustments, then, if you will. I have mentioned several times here this morning my concern for the limitations that we place on our ability to move out our renewable energy resources. This has been a key priority of this administration, has moved towards renewables, and yet it is our own Federal policies here that are limiting any ability in southeast to access, whether it is hydro, whether it is geothermal, or other renewable energy.

So the question this morning is whether or not there is a renewable energy plan for the Tongass. And if so, whether it would be included in the Forest Plan Amendment as we move forward with this process?

And also, I have queried different members of the Cabinet as they have come before other committees to just make sure that we are in agreement here, that hydropower is considered a renewable resource.

So question to you about the broader renewable energy plan and whether within Forest Service you consider hydropower to be a renewable energy resource that would meet with the definition and the goals of this administration.

Mr. TIDWELL. I consider hydro to be renewable energy and it is essential there in southeast, especially, for us to be able to take advantage of that energy source and to replace the barging of diesel to those communities; which, I feel, is just a matter of time before we have an accident where we will then be doing a major clean up. And not only will it reduce the cost, but it also reduces the impact, the potential impact, to the environment. And that is why I think

you are seeing the levels of support from some of the conservation communities and environmental groups about moving forward with the hydro projects.

I know that as we have talked before, there is a long list of proposals, and we are working very closely with the State to be able to take those on. Last year, we dealt with like 29 different projects, 22 of them were Federal Energy Regulatory Commission projects; three of them are now under construction. This year, there are 30 proposals, 24 of them are FERC projects, and we expect to have five of those start construction this year. So we are making headway.

As we have talked, when it comes to the FERC projects, the access that is needed to be able to develop that proposal is provided with, or without, roadless. So it is one of the things that we have to really understand is the flexibility that is within the 2001 roadless rule; that is what we are focused on this year. We will see how everything plays out in the courts for the future. So we are going to be focused on that.

PLAN REVISION

Your other question about what we will consider with this amendment to the forest plan. We want to take a focused effort to be able to, at a minimum, deal with making some, potential changes to facilitate the transition to second growth, provide the bridge. And we will look at other opportunities. We will want to be very strategic in being able to see what we really need to consider.

When it comes to the hydro potential, we have the projects, so we have a good idea of where they are located. It is something we can take a look at before we even make the decision of what we are going to be needing to address. So it is going to be part of the initial assessment that will be done before we get started.

But it is just essential that we move forward and amend the Tongass plan. It is also, Senator, essential that your Sealaska bill gets through. I mean, not only is that important for the communities, but it is essential for some key changes for our transition plan. It is another key part of this that needs to be in conjunction as we move forward with our plan revision.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, I would appreciate your support of Sealaska. It was kind of a long and tortured process. I would like to see that through.

I do want to make sure though that, again, as we are talking about renewable energy projects, we remember that it is more than just the list that is in play today where a blessing has been given to those specific projects.

Because if we are limited to just that, how will a community—whether it is Ketchikan or Kake—be able to grow and evolve in the future if they do not have the ability to expand out their energy needs? And as you have pointed out, their energy needs can best be met through the addition of hydropower resources. We do not want to go back to the bad old days of diesel; that is not the future for this region.

So as we are looking to the forest plan amendments, I think it is key, I think it is absolutely critical that there be a renewable energy plan that not only incorporates our opportunity and potential

for hydropower, but also the geothermal resources that we have there.

And you had mentioned, you know, biomass. There is abundance there, but I think it needs to be incorporated as part of the amended plan going forward. And quite honestly if it is not—if a renewable energy plan is not incorporated—I think that that is very, very inconsistent with, again, this administration's push toward, movement towards renewables. And so, how we balance that, I think, is going to be critical going forward.

But to just suggest that it is just these particular projects that have been identified that meet that criteria, does not allow for a future for the Tongass. So we need to be working with you on really building out that renewable energy plan.

I have gone well over my time, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Senator REED. Senator Tester.

Senator TESTER. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

FOREST JOBS AND RECREATION ACT

I appreciate the administration's increased target on timber cuts. I think it is critical that we get that number up, and I am sure you do too.

Over the past three decades, Montana is not like any other State. I think we have lost over two dozen mills. These mills are partners of the Forest Service. They are partners of the taxpayers. They do a very, very good job in allowing us to be able to manage forests in a way that will ensure forest health.

Without an increase in timber coming out of the Forest Service lands, I think it is an obvious conclusion: we are going to lose more mills. So, and once they are gone, they are gone. They are not coming back. It is one of the reasons that I have tried to push the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, which is a ground up approach, a Montana-made bill, supporting mills, creating jobs, supporting our Forest Service and our forests, and the breathtaking landscapes that are in those. And I want to thank you for the Forest Service support of that bill.

I know that you face challenges in carrying out the projects. I am proud that Congress came together with the reauthorization of the Stewardship Contracting Authority and gave the Forest Service some more tools through the Farm bill.

So the question is, what is the process that you are going to use to evaluate the recommendations put forth by the governors?

FARM BILL

Mr. TIDWELL. For the recommendations that we received from the new authority in the Farm Bill, we have 36 Governors who have submitted their recommendations. We have a team in my office that is actually going through those, all those different areas and I expect that in the middle of May or no later than late May, but probably closer to middle of May, we will be able to respond to each Governor about which projects, which areas that they recommended that we will be able to apply the authority.

So all we are doing is checking about areas they recommended versus what the criteria is in the law. And I can tell you that we have worked very closely with all the State foresters. It is my ex-

pectation that the majority of the recommendations are going to be approved and will allow us to be able to move forward and design projects in those areas and use the new Farm Bill authorities.

Senator TESTER. Okay. So when would we expect the first batch of projects to move forward?

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, the projects themselves will probably be next year.

Senator TESTER. Okay.

Mr. TIDWELL. We have identified these areas, and we have the program to work for 2014 in place today. We will be looking at these areas and factor that into our planning for 2015.

AIRTANKERS

Senator TESTER. Good. I want to go back to a question the chairman asked you on the \$145 million for additional contracting costs for next generation. Is that what I heard you say for the next generation air tankers? That is what the \$145 million was for.

Mr. TIDWELL. Part of our request is to have an adequate number, an adequate funding to deal with the additional costs; 2.8 times as expensive as what we used to have with the legacy aircraft.

Senator TESTER. Okay. And I am not going to argue with that. And Mr. Dixon, if you want to join in on this, you can, because you are fidgeting there a little, so you can jump in.

What kind of metrics did you use to determine the cost effectiveness in that additional 2.8 times? Now, I know you talked about safety, and I know you talked about timeliness of delivery, and those can save money.

So it would seem to me, and I appreciate the \$145 million and I am not going to argue that figure with you. But I just want to make sure that there was some consideration of the effectiveness of these next generation planes and the cost savings that could be associated with their effectiveness.

Mr. TIDWELL. When we put out the contract, we wanted to have aircraft that were safer, faster, and a larger capacity because based on the fire activity that we are seeing today, we needed to be able to provide a larger load of retardant to deal with this.

So we put out those specs and received the bids, and then we awarded the contracts.

Senator TESTER. I got you.

Mr. TIDWELL. The costs just reflect the market.

Senator TESTER. I got you. But was there any account for the fact that the tankers, that they are going to be delivering a bigger payload? That, in fact, they are going to be more cost-effective in that way per hour of flight time?

Mr. TIDWELL. We do expect they will be more cost effective because they are faster.

Senator TESTER. Right.

Mr. TIDWELL. We can get you the information about the cost of a gallon delivered. But the reality is that when we have these exclusive use contracts, there is a set amount that is the cost of the plane for the year—

Senator TESTER. I got you.

Mr. TIDWELL. Plus the flight hours.

Senator TESTER. Maybe this is the wrong correlation, but I will make it anyway. I can haul grain to market in a single axle truck that costs me \$20,000 or I can haul grain in a semi that costs me \$100,000. Over time, the cost per bushel actually is cheaper for the more expensive rig.

And I just want to make sure you have taken those metrics into account because it would seem to me that the effectiveness of these planes are going to be better. Like you said, they are going to be safer. They are going to be more timely and they are going to be able to deliver the payload to where it needs to be delivered in a much more time-effective way. It is going to save money.

Mr. TIDWELL. We will provide you with the analysis that we have done.

[NOTE: This information was provided directly to Senator Tester.]

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Senator TESTER. Good, good. I just want to comment. I really support the administration's Land and Water Conservation request, and I am going to work with my colleagues to provide adequate funding because we have some great projects in Montana that will be done, and I appreciate your support of that fund.

And the last thing, on a personal note, how is your ticker?

Mr. TIDWELL. I woke up this morning, so it is a great day.

Senator TESTER. All right. Well, thank you very much for your work, Chief. Thank you.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator Tester. Thank you, Senator Murkowski. Gentleman, thank you for your testimony and for your service.

ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

The record will remain open until May 7 for any of my colleagues who may wish to submit statements or questions. And Chief, we would ask you to respond as quickly as possible on any written questions that we deliver to you.

[The following questions were not asked at the hearing, but were submitted to the Departments for response subsequent to the hearing:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JACK REED

Question. How does the proposed disaster cap amendment benefit the Forest Service and get the agency ahead of the curve on fire spending?

Answer. The fiscal year 2015 President's budget proposes a new and fiscally responsible funding strategy for wildland fire. To solve the fire problem, we need a comprehensive approach that will restore fire-adapted ecosystems; build fire-adapted human communities; and respond appropriately to wildfire. Wildfire funding has grown from 21 percent of the Forest Service budget in 2000 to over half of the agency budget in 2014. Fire transfers deplete the budget by up to \$500 million annually, which disrupts the momentum of critical restoration work. The impact is felt across critical programs nationwide and exacerbates the frequency and intensity of fires in future years. The suppression cap adjustment would provide a stable source of fire funding and enable greater investment in restoration and fire risk reduction programs.

Question. Please elaborate on the modifications that the Air Force is making to ensure that the C-130Hs are mission-ready for the Forest Service.

What physical work needs to be done by the Forest Service once an aircraft is transferred in order to make it ready to fly?

Answer. The Air Force will complete the Programmed Depot Maintenance (PDM) as well as the Center Wing Box (CWB) and Outer Wing Box (OWB) replacement. The Air Force will also contract for and oversee the installation of the gravity retardant delivery system. After the aircraft is transferred, the Forest Service will need to install avionics and other equipment specific to the airtanker mission.

Question. Is there any funding in the fiscal year 2015 budget associated with delivery of the C-130s?

What will be required of the Forest Service above the \$130 million provided by the Air Force to get these planes in the air, not including the contracting for operation and maintenance

Answer. The Forest Service estimates that approximately \$4.3 million will be required for one C-130H in fiscal year 2015. That cost includes operating costs, pilot and maintenance contracts, required payments into the Working Capital Fund, and minor modifications specified in the question above.

Question. Is it correct that the Forest Service will hit within the target of 18–28 large air tankers in fiscal year 2015?

What level of confidence does the Forest Service have that all of these planes will actually be flying?

Answer. Yes, the Forest Service expects up to 25 airtankers in fiscal year 2015. More specifically, the Forest Service is planning for: 8 legacy airtankers, 16 next generation airtankers, and 1 Forest Service owned/contractor operated excess U.S. Coast Guard C-130H converted into an airtanker. Our confidence is high that all of these planes will be flying in fiscal year 2015.

Question. What accounts for the continued decrease in Urban & Community Forestry?

Are these activities not a priority, or are they being delivered through some other mechanism?

Answer. The Urban and Community Forestry activities remain a high priority for the Forest Service. In the past, a percentage of Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program funds were used to fund competitive, landscape-scale “Redesign” projects, which was essentially formalized in fiscal year 2014 as the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) budget line item. With the proposed \$9 million increase in LSR funds in fiscal year 2015, it is anticipated that Urban and Community Forestry work and communities served as part of the LSR Program will be on a similar scale to previous year’s U&CF representation or equivalent to the \$4.4 million reduction in the fiscal year 2015 budget. In addition, the Urban and Community Forestry program is part of the President’s proposed new \$1 billion Climate Resilience Fund presented as part of the fiscal year 2015 budget. Through this Fund, the President proposes that we:

- Invest in research and unlock data and information to better understand the projected impacts of climate change and how we can better prepare our communities and infrastructure.
- Help communities plan and prepare for the impacts of climate change and encourage local measures to reduce future risk.
- Fund breakthrough technologies and resilient infrastructure that will make us more resilient in the face of changing climate. The Urban and Community Forestry program is part of this, as improving community trees and forests helps remove carbon from the air, reduce the need for stormwater treatment, mitigate flooding and provide other ecosystem services.

Question. Please describe what will be accomplished in the Landscape Scale Restoration program with the funding provided in fiscal year 2014, and why it is proposed for a more than 50 percent increase in fiscal year 2015.

Answer. In fiscal year 2014, the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program will fund over 50 projects in the South, Northeast and West focused on addressing priorities and needs identified in State Forest Action Plans. These projects cover an expansive range of issues—from expanding forest markets, to invasive species management, to agroforestry, to watershed enhancements to urban forestry outreach—all focusing on restoring healthy and resilient landscapes and communities in priority areas within and across States. The LSR budget line item makes it even easier for States and their partners to propose innovative, cross-boundary work that spans multiple State and Private Forestry program areas. In fiscal year 2015, the program will continue to focus on funding innovative projects across boundaries and across jurisdictions to address States’ priorities—and best target and leverage the Federal dollar. This level of funding will also allow the agency to leverage approximately \$6 to \$8 million more in partner contributions and provide the ability to fund approximately 15 to 20 additional projects. The proposed funding level in fiscal year 2015, while 68 percent higher than the fiscal year 2014 enacted, is only 18 percent higher than the President’s fiscal year 2014 request of \$20 million.

Question. Does the evidence in the Integrated Resource Restoration pilot regions show that the flexibility Congress has provided is resulting in more work being accomplished?

What objective measures will demonstrate success?

Answer. The evidence suggests that IRR is allowing the pilots to focus on and accomplish more priority work related to our goal of restoring National Forest System lands. The pilot authority has provided preliminary validation of the benefits that would be derived from nationwide Integrated Resource Restoration authority including:

- increased ability to achieve integrated outcomes at the landscape scale;
- reduced administrative burden;
- previously separate program employees working together to achieve shared restoration goals;
- clear direction and focus for integrated resource restoration within priority landscapes;
- streamlined prioritization processes;
- realization of mutual benefits through integrated planning across multiple resource areas; and
- improved operational efficiencies.

Occasionally, the highest priority work does not produce more outputs, e.g., miles, acres; but addresses areas that are deemed to make the most significant contributions to restoration. Therefore, we are using a combination of objective outcome and output measures to evaluate our progress with restoration. The key outcome associated with the Forest Service's restoration effort is:

- Moving watersheds to an improved condition class as per the agency's Watershed Condition Framework.

The pilot program was able to move six watersheds to an improved condition class in fiscal year 2013 (double the number that was accomplished in fiscal year 12).

We are also tracking the following longstanding output measures under IRR:

- Acres treated annually to sustain or restore watershed function and resilience;
- Miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced;
- Volume of timber sold; and
- Miles of roads decommissioned.

In fiscal year 2013 the IRR pilot exceeded planned targets for acres treated (133 percent) and miles of stream habitat restored (135 percent). The program nearly met the volume of timber sold target at 96 percent, and did not meet the road decommissioning target at 85 percent. Three of the four output measures (acres treated, miles of stream habitat restored, and timber sold) increased over the fiscal year 2012 accomplishment levels (by 11.0 percent, 5.9 percent, and 12.9 percent respectively).

Planned targets were not met primarily due to litigation, market conditions (no bid on a sale), staffing vacancies, fire season, and NEPA appeals and litigation. Many of these conditions would exist regardless of IRR.

We will continue to both monitor the performance results from the three regions under the IRR pilot authority and submit the IRR Pilot Annual Report to Congress.

Question. After years of flat or declining budget proposals for Forest and Rangeland Research, the fiscal year 2014 request included a \$15 million dollar increase. The fiscal year 2015 request asks for an almost equivalent decrease of \$17.5 million. Why such a significant decrease proposed, especially during a time when the Forest Service is trying to implement the new planning rule, which will rely on the science performed within the research division?

Answer. The fiscal year 2015 President's budget requests funding for the highest priority research needs. Recognizing that research is a critical component of the agency, the administration also proposes to provide funding through the combination of the Budget Line Item for Forest and Rangeland Research and the fiscal year 2015 Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative.

Question. How is the Forest Service fulfilling the instructions included with the \$5 million increase for biomass utilization grants provided in fiscal year 2014, to use these funds to develop new high value markets for low value wood?

Where is the increased funding in fiscal year 2014 being focused?

Answer. The increased funding is focused on two critical needs: (1) expanding renewable wood energy use near National Forest System lands in need of hazardous fuels treatments, and (2) promoting wood as a construction material in the commercial building sector. This work helps to create high value markets by expanding the use of woody biomass for energy as well as expanding the demand for engineered wood and other wood products in the institutional/commercial building sector.

Question. What areas would be expanded if Congress provides the budget request's increase of another \$5 million in fiscal year 2015?

Answer. The expanded areas would be to:

- increase grant opportunities to assist with the final phases of wood energy projects;
- stimulate woody biomass utilization in geographic areas with high wildfire risks; and
- promote more widespread use of wood in commercial building construction.

Question. How are the \$2 million in funds provided for Restoration Partnerships being used in fiscal year 2014?

Answer. In March 2014, we issued a field unit request within select program networks, including watershed restoration and utility corridor maintenance networks, to determine project and program needs. We received a total of 33 proposals, representing each region within the Forest Service, with a total request of \$8.8 million. We are currently determining if there are options for additional private-sector leverage of Restoration Partnership funds, and we anticipate the final decisions on the allocation of Restoration Partnership funds to occur in June 2014.

Question. Will this program be continued in fiscal year 2015 without a specific line-item?

Answer. We did not request a separate line-item to fund this program in the fiscal year 2015 President's Budget. We feel the program can be carried out through partnerships under the proposed Integrated Resource Restoration budget line item and existing authorities.

Question. Will the partnerships developed in fiscal year 2014 be continued without new funds?

Answer. Yes, we hope that any partnerships we develop in fiscal year 2014, through the Partnership Restoration funding opportunities, will continue in fiscal year 2015. Our ability to continue those partnerships will be based on need, priority, and funding availability.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN

Question. As you know, California is facing a historic drought. For the first time in 15 years, 100 percent of California is in moderate to exceptional drought according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. This year, the State received only about 50 percent of normal precipitation, and snowpack levels are down to just 16 percent of normal.

California's Department of Forestry & Fire Protection (CALFIRE) reports that since January 1, California has had 1,108 fires on State lands. During the same period last year, the State saw only 697 fires on State lands. This is an almost 60 percent increase.

Clearly, we are facing the likelihood of a particularly severe wildfire season this year that will significantly threaten public safety and infrastructure throughout California and other Western States.

Chief Tidwell, what specifically is the Forest Service doing to prepare for this year's drought-enhanced fire season?

Answer. Due to the drought throughout California and other States, we continue to maintain heightened staffing levels, including organizing trained firefighters from other geographic areas who can pre-position or quickly respond when needed. We've developed short and long-term strategies that include hiring additional agency personnel, utilizing contract resources under existing contracts, creating new contracts, extending options on aviation assets and utilizing assets from other regions on a long-term basis. We escalate and decrease staffing levels commensurate with weather conditions and resource drawdown. In addition to crews, engines, dozers and prevention assets, we maintain aerial firefighting capability with helicopters, air tankers and smokejumpers. Many of the forests have 7 day staffing, as well as 24 hour coverage in some cases. We are also establishing mobilization centers in areas where increased fire activity is predicted, to efficiently manage an influx of fire suppression resources and we are working with our partners and reaching out to the public with focused fire prevention messaging using Fire Prevention Teams and Public Information Officers located in our Geographic Area Coordination Centers. We have also increased patrols and signage, and are providing one united message to the public with regard to the uncharacteristic fire danger levels that exist, especially in California. We are also coordinating with our partners, including Federal, State and local, to ensure information is being shared and that local and geographical area agreements are up to date.

Question. What actions are you taking to have firefighting aircraft (including tankers and helicopters) and fire crews staged in drought stricken states like California?

Answer. As fire danger and risk increase in California, firefighting aircraft will be pre-positioned to respond to fires. Currently, there are four Type I heavy helicopters and nine Type II helicopters, five airtankers and several aerial supervision aircraft in Southern California, ready to respond. Additional aircraft will be moved, if needed. The Forest Service is in the second year of night air operations in Southern California. A night air operation includes a type-2 helicopter and an infrared equipped twin engine fixed wing. Both aircraft started on June 1.

Question. Do you expect the 2015 budget request to adequately cover the costs for this year's fire season?

Answer. The fiscal year 2015 President's Budget request covers our forecasted funding needs for the fiscal year 2015 fire season. Together the request for Suppression and the proposed cap adjustment would fund the 10-year average and anything above the 10-year average equal to the high end of the 90 percent confidence interval predicted by the outyear forecast. For fiscal year 2014, however, any costs above the 10-year average will be covered by fire transfer. The May (median) forecast for suppression spending predicts that the Forest Service will spend \$1.55 billion this fire season, and we were appropriated \$995 million. Therefore, we expect to have to enter into fire transfers again this fire season.

Question. Last summer, the Rim Fire burned over 270,000 acres, including 154,000 acres in the Stanislaus National Forest. While ecological recovery will take many years, there may be only 18 to 24 months from the time of the fire before the downed timber rots and is no longer salvageable.

It is my understanding that the Forest Service has been able to expedite timber salvage along roads and utility corridors on an emergency basis and is currently working on completing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that may allow for an estimated 30,000 acres of timber salvage in the Stanislaus.

Chief Tidwell, can you please provide an update regarding the status of both the emergency timber salvage work as well as the status of the EIS for the larger salvage project?

Answer. An Environmental Assessment (EA) for hazard tree removal along 194 miles of high-use Forest Service roads, administrative and recreation facilities, and areas adjacent to private infrastructure was completed and the Decision Notice signed on April 25, 2014. The hazard trees will be removed through the use of four competitive salvage timber sales, in addition to two settlement sales that were awarded to affected utility companies. All four competitive sales have been sold.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to reduce the potential for future catastrophic fire by reducing the fuel loading and to capture the perishable economic value of the fire-killed trees has been completed. The Draft EIS analyzed over 44,000 acres of National Forest System lands for potential treatment, including an estimated 30,000 acres of timber salvage. The 30-day public comment period on the Draft EIS is scheduled to start on May 16, 2014. A Final EIS is scheduled for completion in August 2014.

Question. When do you expect the Forest Service will be able to award salvage contracts, and when will that allow timber harvesters to get on the ground to begin that work?

Answer. As mentioned above, two settlement sales have been awarded and all four competitive sales have been sold. Now that the projects are awarded, operations can begin immediately.

Projects approved under the larger EIS are scheduled to be advertised for sale shortly after the Record of Decision (ROD) is signed, with a minimum seven-day advertisement period. Operations are expected to begin in early September.

Question. Does the Forest Service have any additional administrative options or legislative recommendations that would help expedite the process?

Answer. An Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) has been granted by the Chief for the hazard tree EA and the larger EIS project. Both projects are under the Section 218 Objection Process. With an approved ESD, there is no objection period (60 days) or objection resolution period (30 plus days). The decision is signed immediately after the public is notified that the decision will be signed, saving 90 days in the process. Since there is no objection process, the public has the option to pursue remedy in the Courts.

We have been successful in requesting and receiving alternative arrangements from the Council on Environmental Quality on the Rim Fire EIS. The approved alternative arrangements allow for the comment period on the Draft EIS to be reduced by 15 days and eliminating the 45-day period between release of the Final EIS and the issuance of the ROD.

Timber salvage volume from the Rim Fire is expected to significantly exceed the capacity of the local manufacturing infrastructure. Hauling costs to manufacturing facilities outside the local working circle is prohibitively expensive. The Forest Serv-

ice is exploring all options within our authorities to enable the woods products industry in California to economically utilize the salvage material available from the Rim Fire.

Question. The 2013 National Defense Authorization Act included a provision that I worked on with my colleague Senator McCain to transfer 7 C-130 air tankers from the Coast Guard to the Forest Service. These planes would also receive maintenance and new wing boxes from the Air Force.

I believe these seven planes are only the first step necessary to provide the Forest Service with the fleet it needs to protect our nation. It is my understanding that at least one or two planes will be transferred from the Coast Guard during this calendar year.

Can you give me a precise update on when the Forest Service expects to begin receiving these planes?

Answer. A transfer strategy and timeline for the planes has been developed and is being implemented. We expect the first aircraft to be transferred in late 2014 or early 2015 and be available for limited operations in 2015, after the Air Force completes their retrofitting work. The C-130H aircraft will be Forest Service owned and contractor operated and maintained. We expect three additional aircraft to be transferred in fiscal year 2017 and the remaining three to be transferred in fiscal year 2018.

Question. California's Department of Forestry & Fire Protection (CALFIRE) has long had a cooperative agreement with the Forest Service to efficiently provide fire protection to all of California. Specifically, this agreement allows California to protect Federal lands and for the Forest Service to protect state lands when it is clearly economically efficient.

In recent years, the Forest Service has faced challenges in fulfilling this agreement. If the Forest Service does not uphold its end of the bargain, it will result in increased costs for both California and the Federal Government.

In this year of heightened fire risk, do I have your commitment to provide California with adequate firefighting resources as required by this agreement?

Answer. Yes, I am committed to provide California with adequate firefighting resources as required in the agreement.

Question. The 2014 Farm Bill contained a provision that directed States to identify forest areas that need treatment for pests and diseases, and the Bill further allowed for expedited environmental reviews.

California has identified and requested three areas that need critical pest and disease treatment to safeguard forest health. These are the McCloud Watershed, the Southfork American Watershed, and the Santa Ana Watershed. All of these watersheds are experiencing a troubling decline in forest health based on annual surveys and are at risk of substantial tree death in the next 15 years according to the California Department of Forestry & Fire (CALFIRE).

Can you provide a status update on California's request for three priority treatment areas?

Answer. On May 20, 2014 USDA Secretary Vilsack announced the designation of over 45 million acres of National Forest System lands across 94 national forests in 35 States to address insect and disease threats. Approximately 1.5 million acres were designated in California within the McCloud/Pit River Watershed, the South Fork American River Watershed, and the Santa Ana Watersheds.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TIM JOHNSON

Question. As you know, the current approach to funding wildfire suppression is unsustainable and hurts many important programs that address fire prevention and support critical resources that we expect from National Forest System lands, including timber, water, recreation, wildlife, and range. I applaud the Forest Service and the administration for including in the proposed fiscal year 2015 budget a solution to this problem based upon the Wyden-Crapo Wildfire Disaster Funding Act that I have cosponsored. This new approach to funding large fires as natural disasters under the existing disaster cap should free up substantial resources that would have otherwise been slated to go to wildfire suppression under the current funding formula. This provides an opportunity both to sustain key programs that would have been cut and to provide substantial additional investment in fire prevention activities, including hazardous fuels and pest and disease treatment and mitigation. In the proposed budget, what programs were sustained and what programs received additional investment with the funding not allocated to fire suppression due to the proposed change in suppression funding?

Answer. The President's budget invests in programs that help us get ahead of the fire problem by restoring landscapes and protecting communities. Compared to fiscal year 2013 and fiscal year 2014 the budget proposes significant increases for Hazardous Fuels (\$52 million above fiscal year 2014 enacted), Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) (\$63 million above the fiscal year 2014 President's budget), Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) (\$20 million above fiscal year 2014 enacted) and Landscape Scale Restoration (\$10 million above fiscal year 2014 enacted). Over \$50 million of the money freed up by the fire cap funds Preparedness and Suppression to cover the reality of our fire operations costs.

Question. I would like to congratulate the efforts of the Forest Service in the Black Hills to work with a broad coalition of partners to respond to the mountain pine beetle infestation. Through the work of these partners, including the forest products industry, the State, counties, conservation districts, and others, tens of thousands of acres have been treated, slowing the spread of the beetles and improving the resiliency and long-term sustainability of the forest. With the interspersed FS and private lands throughout much of western South Dakota, I was intrigued to hear about the effort to coordinate actions between the FS and NRCS to address watershed-scale treatment and restoration across Federal and non-Federal lands. It seems to me that the approach described in the Chief's Joint Partnership would benefit the ongoing effort in the Black Hills. How do you see the Partnership working at this juncture? What do you see as the opportunities and timing for adding additional projects that could increase the pace and scale of critical treatment on non-Federal lands in the Black Hills?

Answer. Through the Chiefs' Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership, the Forest Service is investing \$13 million in 13 projects in 12 States across the country to help reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protect water quality and supply, and improve wildlife habitat for at-risk species. Those projects are still in the early stages of implementation and accomplishments will be summarized at the end of fiscal year 2014. In fiscal year 2015 (pending available funding), the Chief expects to continue to support those 13 projects as well as to consider additional projects that meet the goals of the Partnership. Additional projects would be considered via recommendations from Regional Foresters in partnership with their Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) counterparts. As both the Forest Service and NRCS work with private landowners, there could be opportunity in the Black Hills to consider a recommendation for funding.

Question. The Black Hills National Forest Advisory Board was established in 2003 to improve cooperation and understanding among Forest stakeholders. The Board was chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act to consist of 16 members and 16 alternates appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture with the recommendation of the Forest Service. Regular meetings of the Board have proven to provide an important avenue of communication between stakeholders and the agency. Unfortunately, it continues to be challenging to keep the Board chartered and to fill all vacancies so that the Board is able to maintain a quorum for each meeting. What is the Forest Service doing to work with USDA to help ensure that the Board's charter does not expire and that new members are formally appointed as efficiently as possible?

Answer. The Forest Service and USDA want robust Boards, representing the American people, assembled to carry out the mission in a timely fashion. The Forest Service recognizes the evolving workload and time requirements to evaluate and approve members and charters. We are committed to meeting the timelines to avoid unnecessary delays.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI

TONGASS

Question. As I mentioned in the hearing, it was another subpar year in Region 10. The most recent 5-year schedule projects only about 82 million board feet per year in the future, well below the ASQ for the forest.

How are you going to overcome the ongoing decline in timber sales and ensure that the various timber targets are achieved?

Answer. The Region was on track to meet or exceed all assigned targets in fiscal year 2013; however, the Big Thorne Project received seven appeals. The decision was affirmed, but the Tongass prepared a draft Supplemental Information Report (SIR) that was released May 23, 2014 for a 30-day review by appellants, with the goal of issuing a final SIR later in the summer and offering in late September, 2014. Saddle Lakes Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is expected in 2014

with the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and draft Record of Decision (ROD) in June 2015, and final ROD in October 2015. The Wrangell Island DEIS is expected late in 2014, with the FEIS and ROD in 2015, and a sale offer in fiscal year 2016. The Kosciusko (first large young growth sale) project is underway. The environmental documentation for this project is expected to be completed by February 2015. Field work will continue in the operating season of 2015 with a sale offer in early 2016.

Question. Have you requested adequate funding to restore the timber sale program to what was projected in your 2008 Land Management Plan? If not, why not?

Answer. Funding for the Region 10 timber sale program on the Tongass has been adequate to prepare and offer the assigned program of work. The assigned volume sold targets for the Region have been lower than the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) envisioned in the 2008 Plan. The ASQ represents a maximum annual average harvest from a given National Forest over a ten-year period as determined in the forest planning process.

Question. Why is the current 5-year plan targeting such a low volume of timber? What is needed to increase the volume in the current 5-year plan?

Answer. The current 5-year plan targets an average of 101 million board feet (mmbf) per year for the next 5 years. This level of volume is consistent with the funding provided for the program and the available land base to work with for old growth “bridge timber” sales. The 5-year plan includes the reallocation of staff and finances to planning efforts that incorporate viable and available young growth stands into the targeted program of work.

Question. For years we have heard the Forest Service blame litigation for failure to achieve timber targets on the Tongass. It seems after dealing with these legal challenges for such a long time that there would be some strategy to better address these claims. Do you have a plan to address this issue?

Answer. The Tongass continues to address legal challenges to timber sale projects by improving collaboration with all stakeholders and presenting well-planned projects utilizing planning documents that are clear, concise and based upon the latest science. Implementing our transition strategy to second growth is a key element to reduce litigation and provide a sustainable flow of timber to support the wood products industry in Southeast Alaska. In addition, USDA efforts to assist in converting mills to handle smaller logs and developing additional markets, including biomass, will increase the economic viability of processing wood products in Alaska and reduce the need to export logs. Where export is often required to make projects economically viable, the more jobs that can be supported in Southeast will increase the support for the benefits of an integrated wood products industry needed for community sustainability.

Question. At the hearing, we briefly discussed the status of the Federal Advisory (FACA) Committee that you are assembling to provide advice on the Amendment you are proposing to the 2008 Amended Tongass Forest Plan.

Will you commit to me to balance the FACA Committee with Alaska Native Corporation and pro-development Southeast Alaskans?

To what extent will you commit to me to include Southeast Alaskan representatives from the renewable energy and hydropower sectors on the FACA Committee?

Answer. The Federal Advisory Committee Act has been announced and membership represents a diverse mix of viewpoints, with members from the Alaska Native community, national or regional environmental and/or conservation organizations, the timber industry, Federal, State and local government representatives, and other commercial users.

Question. Will the Forest Service consider adding a Mineral and Strategic Mineral Land Use Designation (LUD) in the Amendment to the 2008 Forest Plan to promote and support mineral and strategic mineral development and related access roads consistent with National Security and National Strategic Mineral Policies?

Answer. The Tongass Forest Plan, in its current form, contains a “Minerals Overlay” Land Use Designation (LUD) which states: “To encourage the prospecting, exploration, development, mining, and processing of locatable minerals in areas with the highest potential for minerals development; and, To ensure minerals are developed in an environmentally sensitive manner and other high-valued resources are considered when mineral developments occur.” We will evaluate whether changes to the Plan are necessary during the amendment process.

Question. The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 found that “accelerated development and use of renewable energy technologies provide numerous benefits to the United States, including improved national security, improved balance of payments, healthier rural economies, improved environmental quality, and abundant, reliable and affordable energy for all citizens of the United States,” and set a goal that by 2025 25 percent of the total energy consumed in the United States

come from renewable resources. Additionally, this administration has placed a high priority on development of renewable energy on public lands.

How is the failure of the Tongass National Forest to have a renewable energy plan consistent with these goals?

Answer. Hydropower projects are permitted through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) authority granted by the Federal Power Act. When projects are located on National Forest System (NFS) lands, FERC determines if the project is consistent with purposes of the NFS lands. The Forest Service submits license conditions to FERC necessary for the protection and utilization of NFS lands and resources. The Forest Service does not propose or plan renewable energy projects, but responds to proposed projects. Under the Federal Power Act, project proponents apply for a preliminary permit and FERC withdraws the land to allow the proponent to study the feasibility of a project. The Forest Service does not pre-determine where the best locations are as that is up to project proponents through FERC's procedures. Section 24 of the Federal Water Power Act of June 10, 1920, as amended (16 U.S.C. 818), provides that any lands of the United States included in an application for power development under that Act shall, from the date of filing of an application therefore, subject to valid existing rights, be reserved from entry, location, or other disposal under the laws of the United States until otherwise directed by the FERC or by Congress. Therefore, the Forest Service responds to project proposals rather than identify potential areas for development.

Question. Alaska is home to a vast amount of energy resources. What is the Forest Service doing to help make this energy available and accessible for the greater public benefit of citizens of Alaska and America, so that we can "home source" our energy supply, recapturing a greater portion of U.S. energy expenditures and job creation benefits that would otherwise occur overseas?

Answer. The national forests in the Alaska Region are committed to responding to interests in developing energy sources in a timely fashion, consistent with forest plan direction. Currently neither national forest is in receipt of any proposals to develop any leasable (oil and gas, coal, geothermal) resources. Both national forests in the Alaska Region address leasable minerals, such as the energy-focused oil and gas, coal, and geothermal, in their forest plans. The Tongass Forest Plan states, as a Forest-Wide goal to, "Provide for environmentally sound mineral exploration, development, and reclamation." Minerals Standards and Guides in the Tongass Forest Plan direct that "leasing may occur on a case-by-case basis following site-specific analysis." The Chugach Forest Plan states as a Forest-Wide goal, to "Provide opportunities to develop minerals for personal and commercial uses."

Question. In 1947, the United States Forest Service (USFS) published a report titled "Water Powers Southeast Alaska," which identified over 200 hydropower resources in watersheds across Alaska. The study summary states:

The report indicates that it is possible to create dependable blocks of power by coordinating many of the power sites into an integrated utility system. There appear to be sites for communities not too far from the general concentration of power and natural transmission patterns.

With the hydropower resources of Southeast Alaska so well understood as evidenced by a body of work assembled by Federal agencies which dates back nearly a century, why is it that the availability of these resources within the Tongass are being ignored and excluded from the Tongass Land Management Plan at a time in our Nation's history when new, clean, renewable energy resources are most needed?

Answer. Hydropower projects are permitted through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) authority granted by the Federal Power Act. When projects are located on National Forest System (NFS) lands, FERC determines if the project is consistent with the purposes of the NFS land. The Forest Service responds to project proposals in accordance with FERC-administered regulations and timelines. After extensive review and coordination with project proponents, the Forest Service submits license conditions to FERC necessary for the protection and utilization of NFS lands and resources. The Forest Service does not propose or plan renewable energy projects, but responds to proposed projects.

Question. Does the Forest Service intend to include a renewable energy plan in the Forest Plan Amendment to the 2008 Amended Tongass Forest Plan?

Answer. The Tongass responds to renewable energy proposals in accordance with applicable Federal law. The Forest Service does not, per se, propose or plan renewable energy projects, but responds to proposed projects. The current Tongass Forest Plan states, as a Forest-Wide goal to, "Provide for environmentally sound mineral exploration, development, and reclamation." Minerals Standards and Guides in the Tongass Forest Plan direct that "leasing may occur on a case-by-case basis following site-specific analysis." We will evaluate whether changes to the Plan are necessary during the amendment process.

Question. Do you agree with the Executive Summary of a 2011, Region 10, Forest Service document entitled “Roadmap to Rural Wealth in Southeast Alaska: Restoration and Timber in Context” in which Region 10 of the Forest Service asserted:

Low-cost energy is critical. The high cost of electric power impedes economic development in the region, yet the region is rich in hydropower potential. The most promising opportunities lie in developing hydroelectric power and building transmission lines to connect Southeast Alaska’s communities to each other and to Canada’s grid, generating electric power for potential export. Such projects would create new jobs through constructing, operating and maintaining hydroelectric and transmission facilities. Previous work by the Forest Service has estimated job creation by this type of work at 10 jobs for every million dollars invested.

Answer. The Alaska Region continues to support the policy of encouraging hydropower production to reduce the high cost of energy while ensuring such development is compatible with national forest purposes and ensuring that the planning, construction, and operation of hydropower projects protect and effectively utilize National Forest System lands and resources.

Question. What has the Forest Service done to resolve the “minimum development” and “no roads” requirements within the 9.6 million acres of Roadless Areas of the Tongass with Congress’s and the Obama administration’s renewable energy policies?

Answer. The Roadless Rule prohibits road construction and the removal of timber in inventoried roadless areas, except under limited circumstances. For example, the Rule permits road construction where a road is needed pursuant to reserved or outstanding rights, or as provided for by statute or treaty. Renewable energy hydropower projects are permitted through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s authority granted by the Federal Power Act. The Federal Power Act directs the Secretary of Agriculture to include conditions that ensure that projects are constructed and operated as “deem[ed] necessary for the adequate protection and utilization of such [national forest lands.]” The Alaska Region works with the proponents of hydropower projects to identify needed infrastructure for the proposed project and how those requirements can be met under the requirements of the Roadless Rule and the Federal Power Act.

Question. The Forest Service acknowledged in a July 20, 2009 letter to Alaska Power & Telephone that a renewable energy project, specifically a hydropower project, sited in a Remote Recreation Transportation and Utility System (TUS) Avoidance Area could not meet the management direction for that LUD consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act, thereby requiring the Forest Plan to be amended. Notwithstanding that the commitment was made to do so nearly 5 years ago, the Forest Service has not amended the Forest Plan, thereby precluding hydropower and other renewable energy projects in TUS Avoidance LUDs. Will the Forest Service correct this problem as part of the amendment process?

Answer. As part of the proposed action in the amendment process, the Forest will consider whether changes are needed to the Tongass Forest Plan to provide for renewable energy project development.

Question. The Draft Southeast Integrated Resources Plan (SEIRP) requires access to hydropower sites to promote hydropower development. The Draft SEIRP identified some, potential hydropower sites in Southeast Alaska. Further, the 1947 Water Powers of Southeast Alaska Report, conducted in part with the Forest Service, identified over 200 such potential sites, many of which lay in the 2008 Forest Plan TUS avoidance LUDs. Such access is severely restricted by Remote Recreation LUDs. What actions do you plan to take in the upcoming amendment to the 2008 Tongass Forest Plan to resolve this problem?

Answer. This will be considered as the Tongass determines what issues may need to be included for updating in the amendment process.

Question. Will the Forest Service consider a Renewable Energy LUD as part of the 2008 Amended Forest Plan amendment process, the purpose of which would be to promote and support all forms of renewable energy development (including geothermal) and related transmission lines within the Tongass consistent with Public Laws and national security and national energy policies?

Answer. This will be considered as the Tongass determines what issues may need to be included for updating in the amendment process.

Question. Would you agree that a Renewable Energy Development LUD would take precedence over any underlying LUD (subject to applicable laws) regardless of whether the underlying LUD is an “Avoidance LUD” or not. And as such, it would represent a “window” through the underlying LUD through which renewable resources could be accessed and developed?

Answer. These types of resource development priority decisions will be considered as the Tongass determines what may be included in the amendment process.

Question. Will the Forest Service consider allowing geothermal leasing in the Tongass as part of the amendment process?

Answer. The national forests in the Alaska Region are committed to responding to interests in developing energy sources in a timely fashion, consistent with forest plan direction. Three geothermal leases at Bell Island have been issued by the Bureau of Land Management, but no development is currently taking place at the site. The Tongass is not currently in receipt of any proposals to develop any leasable (oil and gas, coal, geothermal) resources. Minerals Standards and Guides in the current Tongass Forest Plan already directs that “leasing may occur on a case-by-case basis following site-specific analysis.”

Question. While “reasonable access” is technically permitted in Inventoried Roadless Areas, cutting trees associated with mining exploration and development does not appear to be allowed. 36 C.F.R. §294.13(b)(2) authorizes the cutting of timber “incidental to implementation of a management activity not otherwise prohibited by this subpart.” However, there is no mention of mining in the examples provided in the 2001 Rule and Record of Decision (ROD) of what this section authorizes. Moreover, in describing this section the 2001 Rule and ROD states: “Such management activities are expected to be rare and to focus on small diameter trees.” Will you commit to me to allow a less restrictive form of “reasonable access” for mining exploration and development as part of the 2008 Amended Forest Plan process?

Answer. If an inventoried roadless area on the Tongass is open to mineral entry, locatable mineral mining, including certain activities ancillary to the mining, such as the incidental cutting of timber, may be approved. The 1872 Mining Law gives a statutory right of reasonable and necessary access related to the exploration and development of mineral properties. The statutory right is subject to reasonable regulation for the protection of surface resources.

Question. Will the 2010 Economic Analysis of Southeast Alaska Report be updated as part of the 2008 Forest Plan amendment process?

Are you familiar with what the 2010 report prepared said about the volume of timber that could be produced from second growth stands in the next 10–15 years?

Is there a sufficient volume of second-growth for harvest (subject to the National Forest Management Act’s (NFMA) non-declining, even flow requirement, the Tongass Timber Reform Act’s (TTRA) stream buffer strip requirement’s and Tongass Land Management Plan’s (TLMP) 1000-foot beach buffer zone requirement) to warrant the risk (by bank or operator) to justify putting in a mill, even if there were a market?

If your answer is “yes,” how do you explain the point made, at page 23 the 2010 Economic Analysis of Southeast Alaska that states “young growth management is not currently economically viable without substantial public investments to pay for thinning?”

Answer. The referenced report was prepared by the Alaska Region to explore ways to accelerate the transition of the timber management program on the Tongass National Forest—and the timber industry in Southeast Alaska that is dependent on that program—away from its historical reliance on harvesting old growth forest stands, and towards a program and industry based on the harvest of young growth stands. The forest plan amendment process will analyze the economics of the transition to young growth management.

The report stated that about 8 percent of the forest land on the Tongass National Forest—400,000 acres—is in young growth, half of which is available for harvest under the existing forest plan. As part of the plan amendment process, the Tongass will evaluate which lands should be available for timber harvest to provide economically sustainable young growth, and any proposed changes to standards and guidelines and other management direction to promote and speed the transition to young growth management while maintaining a viable timber industry in Southeast Alaska. Investments in commercial thinning may allow young growth volume to be available more rapidly.

Question. At the hearing, we discussed my concerns about the steady march towards losing what remains of the timber industry in Southeast Alaska and what we can do to reverse this trend.

Please state the current objectives of the Transition Plan.

Answer. As described in Secretary Vilsack’s July 2, 2013 Memorandum, the objective is to transition over the next 10 to 15 years to a more ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable forest management program on the Tongass National Forest, so that by the end of those 15 years, the vast majority of timber sold by the Tongass will be young growth.

Question. Is the Forest Service required to adopt Secretary Vilsack's July 2nd Transition Plan as the Purpose and Need of the Amendment to the 2008 Amended Forest Plan? Is its selection as the preferred alternative pre-ordained?

Answer. The proposed action will be to amend the Tongass Forest Plan as needed to accomplish the transition to young growth management over the next 10 to 15 years while retaining the expertise and infrastructure of a viable timber industry in Southeast Alaska, as outlined by the Secretary in his Memorandum. The purpose and need and any preferred alternative will be identified during the amendment process.

Question. Is one of the Transition Plan's objectives to prevent the harvest of old growth in Roadless Areas? If so, explain how the Plan would be consistent with the 2003 Tongass Exemption.

Answer. Secretary Vilsack's July 2, 2013 Memorandum describes the objective of the transition; the Memorandum does not address roadless areas. There is no immediate change in the application of the 2001 Roadless Rule to the Tongass. As may be appropriate as a result of litigation, the Tongass Forest Plan amendment process may address the Tongass Exemption.

Question. Will the Amendment to the 2008 Amended Forest Plan allow harvest in beach buffer zones and change stream buffer standards and guidelines to increase the inventory of second-growth on the Tongass suitable for harvest?

Answer. The amendment process will identify areas suitable and not suitable for timber harvest to achieve the transition to young growth management. As part of the Plan amendment process, the Tongass will evaluate which lands should be available for timber harvest to provide economically sustainable young growth, and any proposed changes to standards and guidelines and other management direction to promote and speed the transition to young growth management while maintaining a viable timber industry in Southeast Alaska.

Question. Does the recent 9th Circuit's decision upholding the 2003 Tongass Roadless Rule Exemption impact the Forest Service's continuing its transition plan to second-growth timber on the Tongass as set out by Secretary Vilsack's Transition Plan?

Answer. There is no immediate change in the application of the 2001 Roadless Rule to the Tongass National Forest resulting from the 9th Circuit's decision, and there is no current impact to the transition from old growth to young growth timber harvest, as described in Secretary Vilsack's Memorandum.

Question. Is the Transition to second-growth within 10–15 years, as proposed by the Secretary, dependent upon a Congressional amendment to the culmination of mean annual increment (CMAI) requirement set out in the NFMA?

Answer. Commercial thinning in young growth stands can occur without Congressional action, so long as procedural requirements set forth in the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) are met. Those procedural requirements will be addressed in the Tongass Forest Plan amendment process.

Question. If so, what happens to the Transition Plan if Congress fails to act?

Answer. If the procedural requirements of NFMA are not addressed in the Tongass Forest Plan amendment process, the transition to a young growth based industry will proceed, but at a slower, more measured pace.

Question. How do you assess the Forest Service's political chances of getting a Congressional waiver from CMAI, which the Secretary's Memorandum acknowledges is needed, given that CMAI was a key demand of environmental groups for agreeing to clear-cutting in the NFMA after they won the Monongahela suit in 1973 and Zieske case in 1974?

Answer. Culmination of mean annual increment (CMAI) requirements are part of every land management plan. The National Forest Management Act specifically allows exceptions to CMAI requirements ". . . after consideration has been given to the multiple uses of the forest including, but not limited to, recreation, wildlife habitat, and range, and after completion of public participation processes . . ." (16 U.S.C. 1604(m))

Question. Does the Forest Service plan to wait for Congress to act on CMAI before implementing the Transition to second-growth? What will be the status of the Amendment to the 2008 Amended Forest Plan while the Forest Service waits?

Answer. The transition to young growth would be accelerated with an exemption to the CMAI provisions of NFMA, but the Forest Service does not plan to wait for Congressional action and will address the NFMA requirements in the Tongass Forest Plan amendment process.

Question. If a waiver from CMAI is not achieved with the USFS seek to pursue a transition to 2nd Growth through commercial thinning? Forest Service experience with commercial thinning has cost approximately \$6,000 per acre. What level of investment would be required to implement the Secretary's Transition Plan?

Answer. A waiver from CMAI is not necessary for the transition to young growth management. The \$6,000 per acre commercial thinning costs were the result of test contracts to determine the validity of commercial thinning in young growth and included additional costs associated with getting appropriate mechanized equipment mobilized into Southeast Alaska. With those contracts, the Region has successfully offered and sold a 7.4 million board feet (mmbf) young growth stewardship contract (Heceta) without supplemental appropriated funds necessary to complete the project. Heceta was appraised for 100 percent export and appraising for export in the future will be a key component of the transition in order to obtain the value necessary to be able to offer the projects for bid.

Question. To what extent will the Forest Service allow export of 2nd Growth logs to achieve the goals laid out in the Secretary's Transition Plan?

Answer. The Forest Service will allow export of second growth logs, to the extent necessary to achieve a positive appraisal value to offer the project for sale. As domestic processing facilities convert or come on-line to deal with the smaller diameter trees in a young growth sale, the actual export of logs is expected to decrease.

Question. The Forest Service faces a large backlog of pre-commercial thinning and other treatments calculated to benefit timber quality and wildlife habitat. What level of finding will the Forest Service request for these activities?

Answer. Based on the fiscal year 2015 President's budget, Alaska could expect to see a 6 percent (approx. \$1 million) overall increase in appropriated dollars that could be used to help address the backlog of young stands needing for pre-commercial thinning.

Question. The Secretary's July 2, 2013 Transition Memorandum does not propose a departure from the NFMA requirement that national forest timber be harvested on a sustained yield basis. Nor does the Secretary's Memorandum propose to modify the TLMP's 1000 foot beach set back rule or the stream buffer rules set out in TTRA. It thus appears that there is no profitable domestic or export market for second-growth timber from the Tongass National Forest that is subject to the management constraints of the NFMA and TLMP. How does the Forest Service propose to provide an assured supply of second-growth timber sufficient to justify mills and banks providing the financing needed to purchase the equipment and make the mill modifications required to handle second growth timber?

Answer. All of these factors will be considered as part of the Tongass Plan amendment process to achieve the transition as described in the Secretary's Memorandum.

Question. According to the Secretary's Memorandum, the Transition Plan is dependent on Congressional appropriations for "increasing investments in young growth." The Secretary's Memorandum does not explain the level of investment that is needed or how in the face of decreasing Forest Service budgets such additional funds will be obtained and retained. What level of funding is the Forest Service requesting for this specifically and how much volume is it projected to produce?

Answer. The Alaska Region would refocus the existing workforce into planning and executing young growth projects at an increasing pace and scale as old growth "bridge timber" sales are prepared and offered. Annual appropriations at or near the fiscal year 2014 budget level of \$339 million for Forest Products will be adequate for the immediate future.

It is currently uncertain what volume of young growth will be attainable as a result of the forest plan amendment. The proposed plan amendment will be designed to evaluate which lands will be available for timber harvest, especially young growth timber, which lands should be excluded, and additional opportunities to promote and speed the transition to young growth management." There are about 450,000 acres of harvested acres on the Tongass to be evaluated to provide new economic opportunities in future decades, when the trees will be large enough to yield marketable products. Outputs will be dependent upon the characteristics of the stands selected for harvest, the prescriptions applied and the economic viability of the selected treatments.

Question. The Secretary's Memorandum, which results in a timber harvest level of 30-50 MMBF, does not explain what has changed since the 2008 Amended Forest Plan that would allow it to meet the Market Demand requirement of the TTRA which the 2008 Amended Forest Plan ROD said was 200 MMBF. Why does the Forest Service believe it has discretion to nullify the TTRA by so encumbering the suitable land base to surrender its ability to meet market demand?

Answer. The Secretary of Agriculture monitors and reports on timber supply and demand in Southeast Alaska, consistent with ANILCA. As part of the Alaska Region's current program of work, an updated timber demand study will be completed, which will be considered in the Tongass Forest Plan amendment process.

Question. The 2001 Roadless Rule prohibits communities such as Craig and Klawock from accessing mines with a road on Prince of Wales Island, thereby deny-

ing access to jobs to the residents of those communities and a local workforce to Prince of Wales' mines, such as Niblack and Bokan Mountain.

What actions does the Forest Service plan to take to resolve this problem?

Answer. The 2001 Roadless Rule explicitly allows road construction if "A road is needed pursuant to reserved or outstanding rights, or as provided for by statute or treaty." This includes roads needed under valid existing rights established under the 1872 Mining Law. A determination whether a road is needed for these mines will be made upon submission by the mining companies involved of a proposed Plan of Operations that includes construction of such a road.

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING

Question. I have received reports that some of the Regions have been told to shift as much of their commercial timber sale program to stewardship contracting as possible.

If so, why the focus on generating excess receipts by converting what would have been commercial timber sale projects to stewardship contracts?

Answer. The Forest Service Washington Office has not directed the Regional Offices to shift timber sales into stewardship contracts. While we view stewardship contracting as an important tool, it is not our only tool in the toolbox. Both timber sale contracts and stewardship contracts are important tools to accomplish our work.

Question. I have also been told that Forest Supervisors have been telling members of the public that the reason for shifting away from commercial timber sales to stewardship contracting is to allow the Forest Service to keep the excess receipts to use for salaries and road maintenance and under the discretion of the individual forest supervisor.

The original concept of stewardship contracting was that the value of the timber volume would be equal to value of the service contract work to be accomplished. Is that not correct?

Answer. The initial concept of stewardship contracting was and remains including timber volume and service work in roughly equal amounts within a stewardship contract. However, due to restoration needs and contractor capability, there are stewardship contracts where the value of the timber exceeds the value of the service work (producing retained receipts deposited into the Stewardship Contracting Fund) and there are stewardship contracts where the value of service work exceeds the value of the timber (requiring the addition of appropriated funds to the contract).

Question. As I recall, the original premise of the stewardship contracting pilot projects was that the excess receipts were to be used to develop new stewardship contracts. Is that correct?

Answer. Stewardship contracting retained receipts may be spent on new stewardship projects or on accomplishing additional restoration work within an existing stewardship project.

Question. Please provide a table that shows by National Forest the percent of all saw timber sold through stewardship contracting versus commercial timber sale contracts.

Answer. See the table below. Only National Forests with Sawtimber volume sold in fiscal year 2013 are included.

PERCENT OF ALL SAWTIMBER SOLD UNDER STEWARDSHIP AUTHORITY IN FISCAL YEAR 2013

Region	Forest	Total Sawtimber Volume Sold in thousand board feet (MBF)	Sawtimber Volume Sold under Stewardship in thousand board feet (MBF)	Percent of Total Sawtimber Volume Sold under Stewardship (%)
01 Northern Rockies	02 Beaverhead-Deerlodge	127	0	0.0
	03 Bitterroot	4,692	4,557	97.1
	04 Idaho Panhandle	27,601	675	2.4
	05 Clearwater	24,329	21,879	89.9
	08 Custer	131	0	0.0
	10 Flathead	6,295	578	9.2
	11 Gallatin	191	0	0.0
	12 Helena	4	0	0.0
	14 Kootenai	20,990	3,819	18.2
	16 Lolo	1,896	130	6.9
02 Rocky Mountain	17 Nez Perce	6,427	10	0.2
	02 Bighorn	13,349	0	0.0
	03 Black Hills	116,610	2,490	2.1

PERCENT OF ALL SAWTIMBER SOLD UNDER STEWARDSHIP AUTHORITY IN FISCAL YEAR 2013—
Continued

Region	Forest	Total Sawtimber Volume Sold in thousand board feet (MBF)	Sawtimber Volume Sold under Stewardship in thousand board feet (MBF)	Percent of Total Sawtimber Volume Sold under Stewardship (%)
03 Southwestern	04 GMUG	15,813	513	3.2
	06 MedBow-Routt	26,186	2,957	11.3
	09 Rio Grande	8,491	0	0.0
	10 Arapahoe-Roosevelt	8,908	4,122	46.3
	12 Pike-San Isabel	4,243	1,544	36.4
	13 San Juan	7,737	3,865	50.0
	14 Shoshone	2,799	0	0.0
	15 White River	17,413	5,512	31.7
	01 Apache-Sitgreaves	39,206	36,020	91.9
	03 Cibola	6,081	5,787	95.2
	04 Coconino	45,931	36,094	78.6
	06 Gila	692	0	0.0
	07 Kaibab	19,562	18,351	93.8
	08 Lincoln	680	0	0.0
	09 Prescott	1,554	1,554	100.0
	10 Santa Fe	1,049	507	48.3
	12 Tonto	3,865	2,353	60.9
	01 Ashley	465	0	0.0
04 Intermountain	02 Boise	27,526	24,638	89.5
	03 Bridger-Teton	3,289	0	0.0
	07 Dixie	7,549	4,755	63.0
	08 Fishlake	3,904	0	0.0
	12 Payette	10,591	10,572	99.8
	13 Salmon-Challis	3,921	3,447	87.9
	14 Sawtooth	1,528	0	0.0
	15 Caribou-Targhee	53	16	30.2
	19 Uinta-Wasatch-Cache	4,971	307	6.2
05 Pacific Southwest	03 Eldorado	26,054	25,415	97.5
	05 Klamath	21,369	5,808	27.2
	06 Lassen	43,609	0	0.0
	08 Mendocino	11,868	8,036	67.7
	09 Modoc	15,986	0	0.0
	10 Six Rivers	16,393	16,201	98.8
	11 Plumas	44,114	2,888	6.5
	13 Sequoia	4,265	4,016	94.2
	14 Shasta-Trinity	7,826	954	12.2
	15 Sierra	17,784	3,152	17.7
	16 Stanislaus	3,194	44	1.4
	17 Tahoe	16,257	9,952	61.2
	19 Lake Tahoe Basin	336	0	0.0
06 Pacific Northwest	01 Deschutes	41,066	14,628	35.6
	02 Fremont-Winema	25,004	23,493	94.0
	03 Gifford Pinchot	28,565	21,750	76.1
	04 Malheur	38,785	28,619	73.8
	05 Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie	11,731	0	0.0
	06 Mt. Hood	32,727	32,120	98.1
	07 Ochoco	11,440	1,873	16.4
	09 Olympic	24,000	0	0.0
	10 Rogue River-Siskiyou	29,271	1,761	6.0
	12 Siuslaw	38,990	22,105	56.7
	14 Umatilla	16,615	0	0.0
	15 Umpqua	29,751	1,661	5.6
	16 Wallowa-Whitman	27,733	2,875	10.4
	17 Okanogan-Wenatchee	22,566	34	0.2
	18 Willamette	82,692	0	0.0
	21 Colville	33,444	29,020	86.8
08 Southern	ONFs in AL	22,686	5,698	25.1
	02 Daniel Boone	3,310	0	0.0
	03 Chattahoochee-Oconee	2,263	1,162	51.3
	04 Cherokee	6,241	13	0.2

PERCENT OF ALL SAWTIMBER SOLD UNDER STEWARDSHIP AUTHORITY IN FISCAL YEAR 2013—
Continued

Region	Forest	Total Sawtimber Volume Sold in thousand board feet (MBF)	Sawtimber Volume Sold under Stewardship in thousand board feet (MBF)	Percent of Total Sawtimber Volume Sold under Stewardship (%)
09 Northern	05 NFs in FL	5,889	5,486	93.2
	06 Kisatchie	22,807	0	0.0
	07 NFs in MS	30,060	4,070	13.5
	08 George Washington-Jefferson	6,214	0	0.0
	09 Oachita	40,166	0	0.0
	10 Ozark-St. Francis	34,233	11,632	34.0
	11 NFs in NC	11,816	1,469	12.4
	12 Francis Marion	22,713	0	0.0
	13 NFs in TX	18,370	13,294	72.4
	60 Land Between the Lakes	1,059	0	0.0
	03 Chippewa	7,404	2,095	28.3
	04 Huron-Manistee	14,268	2,770	19.4
	05 Mark Twain	31,264	5,634	18.0
	07 Ottawa	7,024	518	7.4
	08 Shawnee	2,023	0	0.0
	09 Superior	7,908	358	4.5
	10 Hiawatha	13,631	3,273	24.0
	12 Hoosier	2,426	0	0.0
	13 Chiquamegon-Nicolet	14,075	1,233	8.8
	14 Wayne	1,515	0	0.0
	19 Allegheny	14,647	4,513	30.8
	20 Green Mountain	2,451	2,451	100.0
10 Alaska	21 Monongahela	3,760	116	3.1
	22 White Mountain	4,924	1,559	31.7
	05 Tongass	13,572	1	0.0
Total	.....	1,588,803	520,802	32.8

Question. Please also provide by National Forest a table that show how much excess receipts were generated through the stewardship contracts for each of the last 5 years, as well as a detailed accounting of how those excess receipts were expended and whether any of those excess receipts went to pay for salaries or other employee expenses.

Answer. The table in Attachment A lists stewardship contracting collections and spending for fiscal year 2009 to 2013. Collections equal the sale value of the forest products in excess of the cost of the service work obtained under an integrated resource contract. Stewardship contracting funds are available until expended for other authorized stewardship projects and may be used for:

- road and trail maintenance or decommissioning to restore or maintain water quality;
- work to improve soil productivity, or other resource values;
- prescribed fires to improve the composition, structure, condition, and health of forest stands or to improve wildlife habitat;
- removal of vegetation or other activities to promote healthy forests, reduce fire hazards, or achieve other land management objectives;
- restoration and maintenance of watersheds;
- restoration and maintenance of wildlife and fish habitat; and
- control of noxious and invasive weeds, and re-establishment of native plant species.

The initial concept of stewardship contracting was and remains including timber volume and service work in roughly equal amounts within a stewardship contract. However, due to restoration needs and contractor capability, there are stewardship contracts where the value of the timber exceeds the value of the service work (producing retained receipts deposited into the Stewardship Contracting Fund (SSCC)). Unused balances in SSCC carry-over into the next fiscal year. This can create a situation where we may plan to spend more SSCC funds than we collect in the current fiscal year.

ATTACHMENT A

FISCAL YEAR 2009–2013 STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING COLLECTIONS AND SPENDING

[Dollars in thousands]

Fiscal Year	Forest Name	Total Collections	Total Spending	
			Other*	Salary*
2009	APACHE-SITGREAVES	0		
2009	ARAPAHO-ROOSEVELT	0		
2009	BITTERROOT		– 12	
2009	BOISE		103	
2009	CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET	213	94	
2009	CHEROKEE		10	
2009	CLEARWATER	243	237	
2009	COLVILLE	293	84	58
2009	DIXIE	0		
2009	ELDORADO	1,300	200	
2009	FLATHEAD	257	20	0
2009	FRANCIS MARION & SUMTER	4	92	
2009	GIFFORD PINCHOT	81		
2009	HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE	1		
2009	HURON MANISTEE	45	44	
2009	IDAHO PANHANDLE	417	38	
2009	KISATCHIE	256	194	
2009	KLAMATH	6		
2009	KOOTENAI	229		
2009	LOLO	0		
2009	MANTI-LASAL	0		
2009	MENDOCINO	2	2	
2009	MONONGAHELA		82	
2009	MT HOOD		– 1	
2009	NEZPERCE	94	7	
2009	NFS IN ALABAMA		62	
2009	NFS IN FLORIDA	1	– 57	
2009	NFS IN MISSISSIPPI	200		
2009	NFS IN NORTH CAROLINA		3	
2009	NFS IN TEXAS	18		
2009	OKANOGAN-WENATCHEE	3		
2009	OLYMPIC	45	44	
2009	PAYETTE	16		
2009	PIKE-SAN ISABEL	0		
2009	RIO GRANDE	0		
2009	SIUSLAW	340	364	
2009	UMATILLA	1,323	1,153	
2009	UMPQUA	92	23	80
2009	WALLOWA WHITMAN	203	266	1
2009	WHITE MOUNTAIN	22		
2009	WHITE RIVER	3		
2009 Totals **		5,707	3,052	139
2010	ALLEGHENY	247	56	
2010	ARAPAHO-ROOSEVELT	80	25	
2010	ASHLEY	8		
2010	BIGHORN	59		
2010	BITTERROOT	40	55	
2010	BLACK HILLS		51	
2010	BOISE	0	5	
2010	CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET	84	4	
2010	CHEROKEE	4	0	
2010	CHIPPEWA	1		
2010	CLEARWATER		0	
2010	COCONINO		0	
2010	COLVILLE	0	47	64
2010	DANIEL BOONE	3		
2010	ELDORADO	243	540	

FISCAL YEAR 2009–2013 STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING COLLECTIONS AND SPENDING—Continued

[Dollars in thousands]

Fiscal Year	Forest Name	Total Collections	Total Spending	
			Other *	Salary *
2010	FLATHEAD	735	41	0
2010	FRANCIS MARION & SUMTER	145	131	
2010	GREEN MOUNTAIN/FINGER LAKES	16	5	
2010	HIAWATHA	96	19	
2010	HURON MANISTEE	24	0	
2010	IDAHO PANHANDLE .....	.....	32	
2010	KISATCHIE .....	.....	0	
2010	KOOTENAI	2	140	
2010	LOLO	38		
2010	MALHEUR	350	20	
2010	MARK TWAIN	47	28	
2010	MENDOCINO .....	.....	0	
2010	MT HOOD	480	285	
2010	NEZPERCE .....	.....	47	
2010	NFS IN ALABAMA	48	4	
2010	NFS IN FLORIDA .....	.....	58	
2010	NFS IN MISSISSIPPI	631	350	
2010	NFS IN TEXAS	585	378	0
2010	OLYMPIC	3	0	
2010	OTTAWA	0		
2010	OZARK-ST FRANCIS .....	.....	7	
2010	PIKE-SAN ISABEL	1		
2010	SHASTA TRINITY	1		
2010	SIUSLAW .....	.....	314	
2010	STANISLAUS	4		
2010	SUPERIOR .....	.....	0	
2010	TAHOE	44		
2010	UMATILLA	3,445	1,416	
2010	UMPQUA	173	0	23
2010	WALLOWA WHITMAN	57	0	—1
2010	WHITE MOUNTAIN	4		
2010 Totals ** .....	.....	7,698	4,058	86
2011	ALLEGHENY .....	.....	73	
2011	APACHE-SITGREAVES	0	0	
2011	ARAPAHO-ROOSEVELT	2	0	
2011	BITTERROOT	8	—5	
2011	BLACK HILLS .....	.....	1	
2011	BOISE .....	.....	40	
2011	CHATT-OONEE	0		
2011	CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET	112	52	
2011	CHIPPEWA	0		
2011	CLEARWATER	593	244	
2011	COLVILLE	150	129	81
2011	ELDORADO	69	851	
2011	FLATHEAD	20	490	0
2011	FRANCIS MARION & SUMTER	978	461	
2011	FREMONT-WINEMA	9		
2011	GEORGE WASHINGTON/JEFFERSON	187		
2011	GIFFORD PINCHOT	43		
2011	GREEN MOUNTAIN/FINGER LAKES	67	29	
2011	HIAWATHA .....	.....	52	
2011	HOOSIER	10		
2011	HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE	31		
2011	HURON MANISTEE	241	—8	
2011	IDAHO PANHANDLE .....	.....	0	
2011	KISATCHIE .....	.....	0	
2011	KLAMATH .....	.....	6	
2011	LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES NRA	7		
2011	MALHEUR	1,840	2,062	

FISCAL YEAR 2009–2013 STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING COLLECTIONS AND SPENDING—Continued

[Dollars in thousands]

Fiscal Year	Forest Name	Total Collections	Total Spending	
			Other *	Salary *
2011	MEDICINE BOW/ROUTT	27		
2011	MENDOCINO	15		
2011	MT HOOD	623	498	
2011	NFS IN ALABAMA		11	
2011	NFS IN FLORIDA	13	— 7	
2011	NFS IN MISSISSIPPI	207	175	
2011	NFS IN NORTH CAROLINA		5	
2011	NFS IN TEXAS	165	303	1
2011	OUACHITA	70		
2011	OZARK-ST FRANCIS	292	0	
2011	PAYETTE		0	
2011	PIKE-SAN ISABEL	1		
2011	SAN JUAN	0		
2011	SHASTA TRINITY	20		
2011	SIUSLAW	526	325	
2011	TAHOE		44	
2011	UMATILLA	868	3,225	
2011	UMPQUA		1	20
2011	WALLOWA WHITMAN	719	269	
2011	WAYNE	81	73	
2011	WHITE RIVER	0		
2011 Totals ** .....	.....	7,994	9,399	102
2012	ALLEGHENY		78	
2012	ARAPAHO-ROOSEVELT	2	25	
2012	ASHLEY		5	
2012	BEAVERHEAD-DEERLODGE		14	
2012	BIGHORN		18	
2012	BITTERROOT	40	10	
2012	BLACK HILLS	21	0	
2012	BOISE	49	87	
2012	BRIDGER-TETON	9		
2012	CHATT-OONEE		18	
2012	CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET	524	51	
2012	CLEARWATER	190	429	
2012	COLVILLE	276	14	36
2012	DESCHUTES	1		
2012	DIXIE	0		
2012	ELDORADO	150	178	
2012	FLATHEAD	79	549	0
2012	FRANCIS MARION & SUMTER	943	462	
2012	GEORGE WASHINGTON/JEFFERSON		64	
2012	GIFFORD PINCHOT	10	41	
2012	GREEN MOUNTAIN/FINGER LAKES	10	21	
2012	HIAWATHA		6	
2012	HURON MANISTEE	6	20	
2012	IDAHO PANHANDLE		189	
2012	KISATCHIE	3	— 76	
2012	KLAMATH	1		
2012	KOOTENAI		0	
2012	LINCOLN	1		
2012	MALHEUR	2,313	1,406	
2012	MEDICINE BOW/ROUTT	3		
2012	MENDOCINO	2		
2012	MONONGAHELA		11	
2012	MT HOOD	207	470	
2012	NFS IN ALABAMA	3	11	
2012	NFS IN FLORIDA	37		
2012	NFS IN MISSISSIPPI	369	165	
2012	NFS IN NORTH CAROLINA		67	

FISCAL YEAR 2009–2013 STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING COLLECTIONS AND SPENDING—Continued

[Dollars in thousands]

Fiscal Year	Forest Name	Total Collections	Total Spending	
			Other *	Salary *
2012	NFS IN TEXAS	325	441	
2012	OLYMPIC	1		
2012	OTTAWA	83	40	
2012	OUACHITA	163	27	
2012	OZARK-ST FRANCIS .....	.....	50	
2012	PAYETTE	89	50	
2012	PIKE-SAN ISABEL	2	1	
2012	PLUMAS	13		
2012	SIUSLAW	688	427	
2012	TAHOE .....	.....	0	
2012	TONGASS	13		
2012	UMATILLA	2,223	0	
2012	UMPQUA .....	.....	51	17
2012	WALLOWA WHITMAN	277	236	
2012	WAYNE .....	.....	0	
2012	WILLAMETTE	305		
2012 Totals ** .....	.....	9,431	5,656	53
2013	AGENCY FINANCIAL STATEMENTS	0		
2013	ALLEGHENY	232	79	
2013	APACHE-SITGREAVES	0		
2013	ARAPAHO-ROOSEVELT	4	0	
2013	BIGHORN	0	18	
2013	BITTERROOT	0	0	
2013	BLACK HILLS	0	16	
2013	BOISE	0	48	
2013	CHAT-OONEE	0	1	
2013	CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET	68	132	
2013	CHEROKEE	12		
2013	CHIPPEWA	0	0	
2013	CIBOLA	0		
2013	CLEARWATER	380	437	
2013	COCONINO	0		
2013	COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE NAT AREA	68		
2013	COLVILLE	755	—9	41
2013	DESCHUTES	500	416	
2013	DIXIE	0		
2013	ELDORADO	695	136	
2013	FLATHEAD	525	346	
2013	FRANCIS MARION & SUMTER	1,028	1,064	
2013	FREMONT-WINEMA	41		
2013	GALLATIN	0		
2013	GIFFORD PINCHOT	38	—17	
2013	GRAND MESA-UNC-GUNN	0		
2013	GREEN MOUNTAIN/FINGER LAKES	111	70	
2013	HIAWATHA	1	7	
2013	HOOSIER	13		
2013	HURON MANISTEE	136	31	
2013	IDAHO PANHANDLE	0	9	
2013	INYO	2		
2013	KAIBAB	1		
2013	KISATCHIE	0	7	
2013	KLAMATH	0	0	
2013	KOOTENAI	171	0	
2013	LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES NRA	0		
2013	LASSEN	0		
2013	LEWIS AND CLARK	11		
2013	LINCOLN	0		
2013	LOLO	70	45	
2013	LOS PADRES	1		

FISCAL YEAR 2009–2013 STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING COLLECTIONS AND SPENDING—Continued

[Dollars in thousands]

Fiscal Year	Forest Name	Total Collections	Total Spending	
			Other *	Salary *
2013	MALHEUR	1,589	2,785	
2013	MANTI-LASAL	0		
2013	MARK TWAIN	3	0	
2013	MEDICINE BOW/ROUTT	13		
2013	MONONGAHELA	3	342	
2013	MT BAKER-SNOQUALMIE	30		
2013	MT HOOD	1,377	253	
2013	NFS IN ALABAMA	0	7	
2013	NFS IN FLORIDA	20	28	
2013	NFS IN MISSISSIPPI	0	655	
2013	NFS IN NORTH CAROLINA	1	11	
2013	NFS IN TEXAS	655	568	1
2013	OKANOGAN-WENATCHEE	0		
2013	OTTAWA	301	270	
2013	OUACHITA	80	20	
2013	OZARK-ST FRANCIS	0	46	
2013	PAYETTE	0	0	
2013	PIKE-SAN ISABEL	0		
2013	PLUMAS	0		
2013	ROGUE RIVER/SISKIYOU	0		
2013	SALMON-CHALLIS	0		
2013	SAN JUAN	0		
2013	SIERRA	0		
2013	SIUSLAW	1,225	1,028	
2013	SIX RIVERS	0		
2013	STANISLAUS	0		
2013	SUPERIOR	0		
2013	TAHOE	361		
2013	TONGASS	0		
2013	UMATILLA	770	597	
2013	UMPQUA	564	16	79
2013	WALLOWA WHITMAN	507	394	
2013	WAYNE	0		
2013	WHITE MOUNTAIN	0	2	
2013	WHITE RIVER	3		
2013 Total **		12,365	9,858	121
Total **		43,200	32,016	501

* Salary is defined as all spending in Budget Object Classification (BOC) codes starting with 11 and 12, and Other is all remaining BOCs.

** The total Costs and Spending may not exactly match the numbers in MAX because data was run at different points in year, which may result in some prior year adjustments.

Question. Alaska's timber industry predominantly consists of small businesses. In fact, small business purchasers have bought the majority of the timber sale volume offered by the Federal Government for the last 60 years. I have asked about the agency's plans for applying the small business set aside requirement to stewardship contracting sales and you indicated that there were "issues" that were being considered.

What are those "issues" being considered?

Answer. The Small Business Administration (SBA) has requested inclusion of the Stewardship Integrated Resource Timber Contracts (IRTCs) in the Small Business Timber Sale Set-Aside Program. The use of IRTC's has increased to the extent that, on some market areas (outside of Alaska), only stewardship sales are being offered; thus, no sales are available to be set-aside for preferential bidding by small businesses when the Set-Aside Program is initiated ("triggered") on a market area.

Question. Does the administration plan to move forward with a small business set-aside program for stewardship contracting?

If so, when do you expect this to occur?

Answer. Based upon direction from Congress, any changes in Small Business Timber Sale Set-Aside Program policy or manual direction are required to go through a public review and comment process. The Forest Service plans to publish a Pro-

posed Directive in the Federal Register for public review and comment which includes adding sawtimber volumes sold via IRTCs in the volumes used to calculate market shares under the Set-Aside Program and evaluating sawtimber volumes sold via IRSCs and their effect upon the Set-Aside Program at the end of the current 5-year recomputation period (10/1/2010–9/30/2015). The Proposed Directive is currently being prepared for Agency and Departmental clearance.

SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS

Question. Your agency's proposal includes a 5-year reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools (SRS). It is the same proposal that has appeared in the last couple of budgets. What we really need is a long-term solution that gets the cut up across our forests so that we have both revenue and jobs.

Approximately how much revenue does the Forest Service expect to collect and use to offset the SRS program cost of \$251 million for fiscal year 2015?

Answer. The proposal for the fiscal year 2015 Secure Rural Schools program includes \$115 million in collections to offset the total cost of \$251 million.

Question. Does the agency have any suggested "pay for's" (Offsets) to cover the mandatory spending proposed for this program?

Answer. The proposal is offset within the President's budget.

AVIATION QUESTIONS

Question. Please provide a table with the description of each of the Next Generation tankers that you expect to be on the line fighting fire this year. In the table please include the name of the contractor, a description of the asset, and status of each contract.

Answer. Next Generation Airtankers Fiscal Year 2014:

Vendor	Type	# of Aircraft	Estimated Start Date
10-Tanker	DC-10	1	05/05/14
10-Tanker (additional equipment clause)	DC-10	1	05/19/14
10-Tanker (additional equipment clause)	DC-10	1	07/01/14
Aero Air	MD-87	2	06/05 and 06/10/14
Aero Air (additional equipment clause)	MD-87	1	07/01/14
Aero Flite	RJ-85	2	06/20 and 06/30/14
Aero Flite (additional equipment clause)	RJ-85	1	07/01/14
Coulson	C-130Q	1	05/13/14
Minden	BAe-146	1	Missed 04/25 Start
Neptune (additional equipment clause)	BAe-146	1	05/16/14
Neptune (additional equipment clause)	BAe-146	1	05/16/14
Neptune (additional equipment clause)	BAe-146	1	06/01/14

Question. As a result of last year's military appropriations bill you were to receive seven older C-130 H models from the Coast Guard. When will those seven C-130's be tanked, certified, and on the line fighting fire?

Please provide a list of each aircraft, what work remains to be accomplished and the earliest and latest date that those individual aircraft will be available for fire-fighting.

Answer. We expect the first aircraft to be transferred in late 2014 or early 2015 and be available for limited operations in 2015 with a Modular Airborne Fire-Fighting System (MAFFS) II system. This aircraft would be fitted with the gravity tank sometime in fiscal year 2016. The C-130H aircraft will be Forest Service owned and contractor operated and maintained. We expect three additional aircraft to be transferred in fiscal year 2017 and the remaining three to be transferred in fiscal year 2018.

Aircraft	Fiscal Year 2014	Fiscal Year 2015	Fiscal Year 2016	Fiscal Year 2017	Fiscal Year 2018
1708	CWR, PDM, OWR	Delivered to USFS, 2nd Quarter	RDS		
1719		CWR, PDM, OWR, RDS		Delivered to USFS, 1st Quarter	
1706			PDM, OWR, RDS	Delivered to USFS, 3rd Quarter	
1721			PDM, RDS	Delivered to USFS, 4th Quarter	
1713				CWR, PDM, OWR, RDS	Delivered to USFS, 1st Quarter
1709				CWR, PDM, OWR, RDS	Delivered to USFS, 2nd Quarter
1714				PDM, OWR, RDS	Delivered to USFS, 4th Quarter

CWR—Center Wing Box Replacement
 OWR—Outer Wing Box Replacement
 PDM—Programmed Depot Maintenance
 RDS—Retardant Delivery System Install

Question. As part of the Farm Bill you receive authorization to contract for up to five new C-130 J models through a leasing scheme.

What steps have to be undertaken before you will have those aircraft available to fight fires?

Answer. The Forest Service is planning on posting a Request for Information (RFI) in Fed Biz Opps to allow vendors to explore innovative options for meeting the intent of the Farm Bill authorization.

Once the Forest Service receives results from the RFI we will evaluate how to move forward in exploring use of this authority. Depending on vendor options provided, fleet needs, and other contracted and owned aircraft already obtained, we may pursue an RFP.

Question. What is the estimated cost of leasing, converting, and finding private contractors to fly and maintain those aircraft?

Answer. Until the proposals are evaluated from the Request for Information, the costs and availability of contractors cannot be determined.

Question. When will each of those aircraft be on the line to fight fires?

Answer. Until the proposals from a solicitation are evaluated, options and timelines are speculative.

Question. During a late March Aerial Fire Fighting Conference in Sacramento, California the commander of the Channel Island Air National Guard base that operates several of the C-130's they provide the Forest Service for firefighting indicated that the Air National Guard and the Forest Service and other would be undertaking a redesign of the MAFF II units because the current units were considered sub-standard. He went on to explain that the current units only lay-down a slurry line that is about 60 yards wide, far less than the 220 yard wide slurry line that is called for.

Why is it that this information has not been provided to Congress by the Forest Service?

Answer. The MAFFS II systems meet the minimum standards for retardant delivery systems established by the Interagency Airtanker Board. The MAFFS II line is narrower than the line produced by commercial large airtankers, but produces a more contiguous pattern. This refinement of MAFFS II will improve performance of the system. The MAFFS II design is over a decade old and new technology and refinement of the existing system may improve coverage levels, effectiveness and reduce overall weight of the system. MAFFS 2.5 will also take advantage of the additional capabilities of the C-130J aircraft based at Channel Island.

Question. What will the expected cost of the redesign be?

Answer. The National Defense Authorization Act 2013 identified \$16 million in MAFFS funding. The Forest Service has already contributed over \$1 million toward the MAFFS 2.5 refinement.

Question. When will the new slurry MAFF III units be ready for use?

Answer. The estimated delivery is 3 years. Once the first system is produced it will have to undergo extensive testing, field evaluation and Air Force review.

Question. Are you concerned about greater risks to ground fire fighters because of this defect?

Answer. No. The MAFFS II systems have performed well since being implemented and continue to be an important surge capacity.

COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE PROGRAM

Question. The Budget request includes a proposal to expand the Collaborative Forest Landscape Program by increasing the funding from the currently authorized level of \$40 million per year to \$60 million per year. Currently that \$40 million supports 23 projects with each approved project eligible for up to \$4 million per year for up to 10 years. This program is heavily geared to restoration in fire adapted ecosystems and is supposed to have as its focus bringing down fire suppression costs by working collaboratively and strategically to bring fire suppression costs down. I am becoming concerned that this program is becoming simply another budget line item to fund collaborative forest restoration work that could otherwise be accomplished through other budget line items outside of the program. There are many opportunities outside of CFLR to expand management nationwide.

What assurances can you give me that the current and future projects selected will be projects suited for this program specifically that meet all its criteria and are not simply work that could be accomplished outside the program umbrella?

Answer. Proposals will be prepared in response to a Request for Proposals that specifically calls for collaborative teams to address how their project meets the purposes of the Act. In addition, proposals will be reviewed by an interdisciplinary Federal Advisory Committee that will recommend projects for funding to the Secretary. This Advisory Committee will specifically be looking for projects that meet the criteria of the Act.

Question. The CFLR program requires matching funds for projects approved under the program. I am receiving reports from regions with CFLR projects that CFLR funds are not supplementing but are actually supplanting or displacing regular funds for national forest system units that have projects. To your knowledge, is this occurring?

Answer. Regions and Forests have prioritized the funding of CFLR projects against other initiatives or priorities. In many cases, CFLR is the primary program of work or a major part of their program of work. The matching funds for the program utilize appropriated Agency funds, in-kind and partner contribution as well as funds provided through the legislation.

Question. What assurances can you give me that the CFLR funds are truly supplemental to regular unit funds and that concrete financial matching is occurring at the regions?

Answer. We keep detailed records on the funding spent for each project. In fiscal year 2012, projects spent \$26.2 million in CFLR funds and over \$59 million in other funds, including \$12.4 million in partner contributions.

Question. What significant results can you report on today from the projects funded through the program that would justify a 50 percent increase in funding at this time?

Answer. In fiscal year 2014, we have 23 projects funded through CFLR. Between fiscal year 2010 and fiscal year 2013, these 23 projects have generated more than 838 million board feet (mmbf) of timber, established or improved forest vegetation on 191,000 acres, restored or enhanced 936,000 acres of terrestrial habitat, and enhanced community safety through the treatment of hazardous fuels on more than 661,200 acres. Additionally, in fiscal year 2013 alone these projects created or maintained more than 5,307 jobs and generated more than \$195 million in labor income, supporting rural economies in 14 States.

Note that these accomplishments are larger than what was reported in the fiscal year 2015 Budget Justification because they include the three additional projects added in fiscal year 2013, whereas the Budget Justification only reported on the accomplishments of the 20 projects that existed as of 2012.

Question. If the program authorization were increased and funded at \$60 million, outline specifically what/how the Forest Service would spend that additional funding?

Answer. The fiscal year 2015 President's budget would expand the authority of the 23 existing projects and also permit the investment in up to 10 new CFLRP projects. New CFLRP projects will be submitted by Forest Service Regions and reviewed by the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee will then submit recommendations for funding projects to the Secretary of Agriculture, who will make a final decision regarding which projects will receive CFLRP funds. The Secretary may select up to 10 new projects for funding in fiscal year 2015. As the new projects are selected and begin to implement treatments on the ground, we expect outputs to increase. The increases are primarily expected in fiscal year 2016 and beyond.

Question. Please provide the list of current projects and how much each project has received to date, and would be expected to receive in fiscal year 2015 if funded at the \$40 million level? If funded at the \$60 million level?

Answer. The table below displays the funding to date by project and planned project funding for fiscal year 2015 at the \$40 and \$60 million levels. We plan to allocate approximately \$13.4 million of the additional \$20 million requested in fiscal year 2015 to existing projects and use the remaining to begin work on new projects that would be identified and selected in fiscal year 2015.

Project Name	Reg.	Forest(s)	Total Funds (Fiscal Year 2010 to Fiscal Year 2014)	Fiscal Year 2015 CFLRP funded at \$40 million level	Fiscal Year 2015 CFLRP funded at \$60 million level
Southwestern Crown of the Continent	1	Lolo, Flathead, Helena ..	\$16,366,292	\$2,996,206	\$4,000,000
Selway-Middle Fork Clearwater Project	1	Nez Perce, Clearwater ...	16,209,079	2,996,206	4,000,000
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative	1	Idaho Panhandle	2,004,265	1,002,125	1,337,859
Uncompahgre Plateau	2	Uncompahgre	4,279,120	849,724	1,134,400
Colorado Front Range	2	Arapaho, Roosevelt, Pike, San Isabel.	16,339,017	2,996,206	4,000,000
4 Forest Restoration Initiative	3	Apache-Sitgreaves, Kaibab, Coconino, Tonto.	17,337,007	2,996,206	4,000,000
Southwest Jemez Mountains	3	Santa Fe/Valles Caldera Trust & National Pre- serve.	14,118,012	2,996,206	4,000,000
Zuni Mountain CFLRP	3	Cibola	1,965,501	599,241	800,000
Weiser-Little Salmon Headwaters CFLRP	4	Payette	9,694,537	2,883,848	3,850,000
Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project	5	Sierra	5,105,832	940,074	1,255,019
Burney-Hat Creek Basins Project	5	Lassen	2,746,110	1,057,144	1,411,310
Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group Corner- stone Project.	5	Eldorado and Stanislaus.	3,794,317	1,208,515	1,613,394
Tapash	6	Okanagan-Wenatchee ...	10,364,010	310,247	414,187
Deschutes Skyline	6	Deschutes	4,783,687	1,007,100	1,344,500
Lakeview Stewardship CFLR Proposal	6	Fremont-Winema	10,229,507	2,172,249	2,900,000
Southern Blues Restoration Coalition	6	Malheur	7,393,067	1,872,629	2,500,000
Northeast Washington Forest Vision 2020 ..	6	Colville	5,767,003	2,713,952	3,623,185
Accelerating Longleaf Pine Restoration in Northeast Florida.	8	Florida/Osceola	7,090,863	1,336,439	1,784,175
Shortleaf-Bluestem Community	8	Ouachita	5,097,110	1,789,858	2,389,500
Grandfather Restoration Project	8	Pisgah	1,588,596	359,345	479,733
Ozark Highlands Ecosystem Restoration	8	Ozark-St. Francis	5,079,472	1,613,629	2,154,230
Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Restoration and Hazardous Fuels Reduction.	8	De Soto	8,161,331	2,247,154	3,000,000
Missouri Pine-Oak Woodlands Restoration ..	9	Mark Twain	2,525,831	1,055,697	1,409,379
Total .....	.....	.....	178,039,566	40,000,000	53,400,871

Question. The Forest Service is scheduled to report to Congress on the program at the five year mark to determine whether it is meeting the program goals. Are you on schedule to complete this report? When can Congress expect to receive it?

Answer. We are on track to meet this request. In 2011, we began a collaborative process with project groups and interested partners to develop indicators to feed this required report. Project teams are poised to report out on these indicators at the close of the fiscal year. This information will be supplemented with data gathered through our annual reporting cycle. We are working with internal experts, partner groups, and collaborative projects to develop a template to best report project progress with the goal of completing the report in March 2015.

WILDFIRE CAP ADJUSTMENT

Question. If budgeting and requesting 100 percent of the 10-year average isn't working, and your suppression costs are exceeding those levels, has the Forest Service considered using any different method to determine your budget request that might be more accurate?

Answer. Using the 10-year average is a viable method for determining funding need, as is the case with wildfire suppression. The fiscal year 2015 President's budget recognizes that catastrophic fires should be considered disasters, and includes a

proposed cap adjustment that is designed to budget for the likely worst case scenario.

Question. Instead of requesting 100 percent of the 10-year rolling average, your budget proposal requests just 70 percent of it. This departs from the longstanding practice of the agency requesting the 10-year average and this committee providing that amount. How did you arrive at the 70 percent number?

Answer. We are requesting 70 percent of the 10-year average because Forest Service and the Department of the Interior analysis has shown that 1 percent of fires represent 30 percent of Suppression costs. These are the most difficult, most costly fires—truly outside the norm and akin to “disasters.” The other 70 percent represent costs of 99 percent of fires—those “normal” fires that should be paid for within the agencies’ budgets. The remaining 30 percent and anything above the 10-year average would be paid for like Congress pays for other disasters—through a cap adjustment.

Question. Is it the position of the Forest Service that simply exceeding 70 percent of the 10-year rolling average of suppression costs equals an emergency or as you are calling it a “disaster?” Please explain.

Answer. No. The administration recommends that funds within the budget cap adjustment be accessible only for wildland fire suppression operations if one or more of the following criteria are met and a declaration has been issued by the Secretary of Agriculture (or the Department of the Interior):

- a fire has required an emergency Federal response based on significant complexity, severity, or threat posed by the fire to human life, property, or resources; or
- the fire covers 1,000 acres or more; or
- the fire is within 10 miles of a major urban area (defined as 50,000 inhabitants or more); and
- the cumulative costs of wildfire suppression operations will exceed all of the amounts previously appropriated within 30 days.

Question. One of the arguments being made in support of this proposal is that it will allow the agencies to fund in its program budget more fire prevention activities including hazardous fuel reduction and forest restoration, because now you must only ask for 70 percent of the 10-year average instead of 100 percent? Can you outline for me specifically how much of these newly freed up funds have been made available to the Forest Service through the cap adjustment and how you intend to spend it?

Answer. Compared to the fiscal year 2014 enacted budget, over \$160 million would be “freed up” in the Forest Service to invest in prevention and preparedness programs with this proposal. Those funds would go towards Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR), Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLRP), Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR), Hazardous Fuels, Suppression and Preparedness in fiscal year 2015 (the fiscal year 2015 Forest Service proposed budget is \$125 million less than the fiscal year 2014 enacted budget, due to continued efforts to reduce the deficit). When the fiscal year 2015 budget request was being prepared, the fiscal year 2014 budget was not enacted. As such, comparisons were made to the fiscal year 2014 President’s budget. When doing so, over \$300 million in additional funding was allocated to LSR, CFLRP, IRR, Hazardous Fuels, Suppression, Preparedness, and State and Volunteer Fire Assistance.

Question. What is your legislative strategy to enact the cap adjustment?

Answer. The Administration is working with Congress and stakeholders to support and explain this proposal, especially the effects the fire funding problem is having on the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior programs. Given that a similar approach was proposed in bi-partisan bills in both the Senate and House, the administration is looking forward to working with congressional leaders in both Chambers to educate fellow members and encourage support, especially in the Budget Committees.

ROADLESS RULE

Question. Last month’s Ninth Circuit Court Decision upheld the rulemaking by which the USDA promulgated the 2003 Tongass Exemption. In promulgating the 2003 Exemption rule the USDA relied upon the 2000 Roadless Rule Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The case was remanded to the United States District Court for the District of Alaska to decide whether or not a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) should have been prepared to support the 2003 Exemption rule. If the District Court determines that a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) should have been prepared will the Forest Service prepare an SEIS in support of the 2003 rulemaking?

Answer. The Forest Service will comply with the terms of the District Court's judgment at the time that it is issued.

Question. If the District Court determines that a SEIS was not required will the Forest Service appeal that decision to the 9th Circuit.

Answer. The Forest Service will comply with the terms of the District Court's judgment at the time that it is issued.

Question. If the District Court determines that a SEIS was not required and an appeal, if any, agrees that a SEIS is not required will the USDA engage in new rulemaking to extinguish the 2003 Exemption?

Answer. The Forest Service will comply with the terms of the District Court's judgment at the time that it is issued.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JOHN HOEVEN

Question. As you mention in your testimony, one of the three key areas the President's fiscal year 2015 budget focuses on is managing wildland fires. As you know, wildfires have always been common and widespread in North Dakota. On a broader scale, there are more than 70,000 communities that we know are at risk from wild-fire.

Specifically, the State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance Programs are primary Federal programs that assist communities to prepare for, and States and local fire departments to respond to, wildfires. We know that State and local resources are often the first to arrive at wildland fires, regardless of where they start—national forests, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), private or State lands. How is your department focusing on helping communities prepare for wildfires in advance and bolstering state and local initial attack resources to help keep unwanted fires, and their costs, as low as possible?

Answer. Our Cooperative Fire programs—State and Volunteer Fire Assistance—provide funding for training and equipping State and local firefighters, to build capacity to provide effective initial attack response to wildfire. These State and local firefighters are often the Nation's first line of defense against wildland fires—almost 75 percent of wildland fires are first responded to by State and local fire departments. We will continue to provide funding that is level with fiscal year 2014 amounts in the fiscal year 2015 budget for these important programs. We are also focusing our hazardous fuels treatments in and around communities to help reduce the risk of wildfires. In particular the fiscal year 2015 President's budget contains a proposal to provide \$38 million in competitive funding for projects that reduce the risk to communities, targeted to areas of high risk near communities actively working on becoming fire adapted.

Question. As you know, I was a member of the Senate and House conference committee which worked to pass a long-term Farm Bill. Included in the bill are several important authorities for the Forest Service which I hope will help reduce the cost of managing forests. Specifically, we included authority for stewardship contracting, the Good Neighbor Authority, and the Insect & Disease Infestation provision.

Can you speak to the role of each of these authorities in helping the Forest Service get more work done on the ground, work that is urgently needed to ensure long-term ecological, economic and social health of our forests, communities, and economies?

Answer. The Forest Service expects that the authorities included in the Farm Bill—permanent reauthorization for stewardship contracting, the Good Neighbor Authority, and the Insect & Disease Infestation provision will help us to more effectively restore our national forests while also benefiting local communities.

Stewardship contracting helps the Forest Service achieve land and natural resource management goals while promoting closer public-private working relationships by using the value of forest products to offset the cost of services. Improved economic conditions and expanded markets for products have contributed to the expanded use of this tool. Overall, during the past 6 fiscal years, stewardship contracting acreage has nearly tripled. In addition to improved economic conditions, a better understanding of how to best use the tool has led to the increased size of projects. In fiscal year 2013 the Forest Service: established over 3,300 acres of forest vegetation, improved over 72,000 acres of wildlife habitat, treated over 130,000 acres of hazardous fuels, and treated over 2,700 acres of noxious weeds and invasive plants through stewardship contracting.

The Forest Service is very interested in the recently expanded Good Neighbor Authority. We believe it will provide an important new tool to allow us to work more effectively with States implementing needed watershed restoration activities.

The Farm Bill provided the opportunity for Governors to request areas to be designated in their State that are experiencing, or at risk of an insect or disease epidemic. Based on the Governor's recommendations, the Forest Service has designated over 45 million acres of National Forest System lands across 94 national forests in 35 States to address insect and disease threats. The Forest Service will collaboratively work with States, tribes, partners, stakeholders and the public to implement landscape scale restoration projects within these designated areas that reduce the risk of insect and disease infestations. The ability to use the expedited National Environmental Policy Act procedures found in section 104 of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act for environmental analyses along with the new categorical exclusion to implement collaborative restoration projects within these designated areas will help to provide for more efficient decisionmaking and project implementation.

Question. Could you please provide me with an update on the science you are using for the determination of management practices for the grasslands? Specifically, what science was used to develop the Draft Record of Decision (ROD) for the North Billings County Allotment Management Plan Revisions?

Answer. After signing the Dakota Prairie Grasslands Plan in 2002, the Regional Forester empanelled an independent group of scientists to review the parts of the plan related to livestock grazing. The resulting Scientific Review Team (SRT) consisted of eight members. Team members were selected based on recommendations of the North Dakota Governor's office, conservation and industry groups, state and Federal natural resource agencies, and county representatives. Recommendations from the SRT were incorporated into the Draft Record of Decision. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and North Dakota State University (NDSU) also contributed numerous data.

Question. When will the Forest Service formalize the final document?

Answer. The North Billings County Allotment Management Plan Revisions are subject to the new pre-decisional objection process for NEPA decisions. Review of the eight objections received from seven Objectors began in May 2014. Objection resolution meetings were held on June 2, 2015 and objection letters were signed on June 10, 2014. A final decision is expected after June 12, 2014.

CONCLUSION OF HEARINGS

Senator REED. And with that, and with no further business, I will adjourn the hearing.

[Whereupon, at 10:56 a.m., Wednesday, April 30, the hearings were concluded, and the subcommittee was recessed, to reconvene subject to the call of the Chair.]